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DEMOS

VOL. II.

DEMOS

A STORY OF ENGLISH SOCIALISM

‘Jene machen Partei; welch’ unerlaubtes Beginnen!
Aber unsre Partei, freilich, versteht sich von selbst’
GOETHE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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D E M O S.

CHAPTER I.

IN the church of the Insurgents there are many orders. To rise to the supreme passion of revolt, two conditions are indispensable: to possess the heart of a poet, and to be subdued by poverty to the yoke of ignoble labour. But many who fall short of the priesthood have yet a share of the true spirit, bestowed upon them by circumstances of birth and education, developed here and there by the experience of life, yet rigidly limited in the upshot by the control of material ease, the fatal lordship of the comfortable commonplace. Of such was Hubert Eldon. In him, despite his birth and breeding, there came to the surface a rich vein of independence, obscurely traceable, no doubt, in the characters of certain of his ancestors, appearing at length where nineteenth-century influences had thinned the detritus of conven-

tion and class prejudice. His nature abounded in contradictions, and as yet self-study—in itself the note of a mind striving for emancipation—had done little for him beyond making clear the manifold difficulties strewn in his path of progress.

You know already that it was no vulgar instinct of sensuality which had made severance between him and the respectable traditions of his family. Observant friends naturally cast him in the category of young men whom the prospect of a fortune seduces to a life of riot; his mother had no means of forming a more accurate judgment. Mr. Wyvern alone had seen beneath the surface, aided by a liberal study of the world, and no doubt also by that personal sympathy which is so important an ally of charity and truth. Mr. Wyvern's early life had not been in smooth waters; in him too revolt was native, tempered also by spiritual influences of the most opposite kind. He felt a deep interest in the young man, and desired to keep him in view. It was the first promise of friendship that had been held out to Hubert, who already suffered from a sense of isolation, and was wondering in what class of society he would have to look for his kith and kin. Since boyhood he had drawn apart to a great extent from the companionships which most readily offered. The turn taken by the circumstances

of his family affected the pride which was one of his strongest characteristics; his house had fallen, and it seemed to him that a good deal of pity, if not of contempt, mingled with his reception by the more fortunate of his own standing. He had never overcome a natural hostility to old Mr. Mutimer; the *bourgeois* virtues of the worthy ironmaster rather irritated than attracted him, and he suffered intensely in the thought that his mother brought herself to close friendship with one so much her inferior just for the sake of her son's future. In this matter he judged with tolerable accuracy. Mrs. Eldon, finding in the old man a certain unexpected refinement over and above his goodness of heart, consciously or unconsciously encouraged herself in idealising him, that the way of interest might approach as nearly as might be to that of honour. Hubert, with no understanding for the craggy facts of life, inwardly rebelled against the whole situation. He felt that it laid him open to ridicule, the mere suspicion of which always stung him to the quick. When, therefore, he declared to his mother, in the painful interview on his return to Wanley, that it was almost a relief to him to have lost the inheritance, he spoke with perfect truth. Amid the tempest which had fallen on his life there rose in that moment

the semblance of a star of hope. The hateful conditions which had weighed upon his future being finally cast off, might he not look forward to some nobler activity than had hitherto seemed possible? Was he not being saved from his meaner self, that part of his nature which tended to conventional ideals, which was subject to empty pride and ignoble apprehensions? Had he gone through the storm without companion, hope might have overcome every weakness, but sympathy with his mother's deep distress troubled his self-control. At her feet he yielded to the emotions of childhood, and his misery increased until bodily suffering brought him the relief of unconsciousness.

To his mother perhaps he owed that strain of idealism which gave his character its significance. In Mrs. Eldon it affected only the inner life; in Hubert spiritual strivings naturally sought the outlet of action. That his emancipation should declare itself in some exaggerated way was quite to be expected: impatience of futilities and insincerities made common cause with the fiery spirit of youth and spurred him into reckless pursuit of that abiding rapture which is the dream and the despair of the earth's purest souls. The pistol bullet checked his course, happily at the right moment. He had gone far enough for experience and not too far for self-recovery. The wise man in looking

back upon his endeavours regrets nothing of which that can be said.

By the side of a passion such as that which had opened Hubert's intellectual manhood, the mild, progressive attachments sanctioned by society show so colourless as to suggest illusion. Thinking of Adela Waltham as he lay recovering from his illness, he found it difficult to distinguish between the feelings associated with her name and those which he had owed to other maidens of the same type. A week or two at Wanley generally resulted in a conviction that he was in love with Adela; and had Adela been entirely subject to her mother's influences, had she fallen but a little short of the innocence and delicacy which were her own, whether for happiness or the reverse, she would doubtless have been pledged to Hubert long ere this. The merest accident had in truth prevented it. At home for Christmas, the young man had made up his mind to speak and claim her: he postponed doing so till he should have returned from a visit to a college friend in the same county. His friend had a sister, five or six years older than Adela, and of a warmer type of beauty, with the finished graces of the town. Hubert found himself once more without guidance, and so left Wanley behind him, journeying to an unknown land.

Hubert could not remember a time when he

had not been in love. The objects of his devotion had succeeded each other rapidly, but each in her turn was the perfect woman. His imagination cast a halo about a beautiful head, and hastened to see in its possessor all the poetry of character which he aspired to worship. In his loves, as in every other circumstance of life, he would have nothing of compromise; for him the world contained nothing but his passion, and existence had no other end. Between that past and this present more intervened than Hubert could yet appreciate; but he judged the change in himself by the light in which that early love appeared to him. Those were the restless ardours of boyhood: he could not henceforth trifle so with solemn meanings. The ideal was harder of discovery than he had thought; perhaps it was not to be found in the world at all. But what less perfect could henceforth touch his heart?

Yet throughout his convalescence he thought often of Adela, perhaps because she was so near, and because she doubtless often thought of him. His unexpected meeting with her on Stanbury Hill affected him strangely; the world was new to his eyes, and the girl's face seemed to share in the renewal; it was not quite the same face that he had held in memory, but had a fresh significance. He read in her looks more than formerly he had been able to see.

This impression was strengthened by his interview with her on the following day. Had she too grown much older in a few months?

After spending a fortnight with his mother at Agworth, he went to London, and for a time thought as little of Adela as of any other woman. New interests claimed him, interests purely intellectual, the stronger that his mind seemed just aroused from a long sleep. He threw himself into various studies with more zeal than he had hitherto devoted to such interests; not that he had as yet any definite projects, but solely because it was his nature to be in pursuit of some excellence and to scorn mere acquiescence in a life of every-day colour. He lived all but in loneliness, and when the change had had time to work upon him his thoughts began to revert to Adela, to her alone of those who stood on the other side of the gulf. She came before his eyes as a vision of purity; it was soothing to picture her face and to think of her walking in the spring meadows. He thought of her as of a white rose, dew-besprent, and gently swayed by the sweet air of a sunny morning; a white rose newly spread, its heart virgin from the hands of shaping Nature. He could not decide what quality, what absence of fault, made Adela so distinct to him. Was it perhaps the exquisite delicacy apparent in all she did or said? Even

the most reverent thought seemed gross in touching her; the mind flitted round about her, kept from contact by a supreme modesty, which she alone could inspire. If her head were painted, it must be against the tenderest eastern sky; all associations with her were of the morning, when heatless rays strike level across the moist earth, of simple devoutness which renders thanks for the blessing of a new day, of mercy robed like the zenith at dawn.

His study just now was of the early Italians, in art and literature. There was more of Adela than he perceived in the impulse which guided him in that direction. When he came to read the 'Vita Nuova,' it was of Adela expressly that he thought. The poet's passion of worship entered his heart; transferring his present feeling to his earlier self, he grew to regard his recent madness as a lapse from the true love of his life. He persuaded himself that he had loved Adela in a far more serious way than any of the others who from time to time had been her rivals, and that the love was now returning to him, strengthened and exalted. He began to write sonnets in Dante's manner, striving to body forth in words the new piety which illumined his life. Whereas love had been to him of late a glorification of the senses, he now cleansed himself from what he deemed impurity and adored in mere ecstasy of the spirit. Adela

soon became rather a symbol than a living woman; he identified her with the ends to which his life darkly aspired, and all but convinced himself that memory and imagination would henceforth suffice to him.

In the autumn he went down to Agworth, and spent a few days with his mother. The temptation to walk over to Wanley and call upon the Walthams proved too strong to be resisted. His rejection at their door was rather a shock than a surprise; it had never occurred to him that the old friendly relations had been in any way disturbed; he explained Mrs. Waltham's behaviour by supposing that his silence had offended her, and perhaps his failure to take leave of her before quitting Wanley. Possibly she thought he had dealt lightly with Adela. Offence on purely moral grounds did not even suggest itself.

He returned to London anxious and unhappy. The glimpse of Adela sitting at the window had brought him back to reality; after all it was no abstraction that had become the constant companion of his solitude; his love was far more real for that moment's vision of the golden head, and had a very real power of afflicting him with melancholy. He faltered in his studies, and once again had lost the motive to exertion. Then came the letter from his mother, telling of Adela's rumoured engage-

ment. It caused him to set forth almost immediately.

The alternation of moods exhibited in his conversation with Mr. Wyvern continued to agitate him during the night. Now it seemed impossible to approach Adela in any way; now he was prepared to defy every consideration in order to save her and secure his own happiness. Then, after dwelling for awhile on the difficulties of his position, he tried to convince himself that once again he had been led astray after beauty and goodness which existed only in his imagination, that in losing Adela he only dismissed one more illusion. Such comfort was unsubstantial; he was, in truth, consumed in wretchedness at the thought that she once might easily have been his, and that he had passed her by. What matter whether we love a reality or a dream, if the love drive us to frenzy? Yet how could he renew his relations with her? Even if no actual engagement bound her, she must be prejudiced against him by stories which would make it seem an insult if he addressed her. And if the engagement really existed, what shadow of excuse had he for troubling her with his love?

When he entered his mother's room in the morning, Mrs. Eldon took a small volume from the table at her side.

‘I found this a few weeks ago among the

books you left with me,' she said. 'How long have you had it, Hubert?'

It was a copy of the 'Christian Year,' and writing on the fly-leaf showed that it belonged, or had once belonged, to Adela Waltham.

Hubert regarded it with surprise.

'It was lent to me a year ago,' he said. 'I took it away with me. I had forgotten that I had it.'

The circumstances under which it had been lent to him came back very clearly now. It was after that visit to his friend which had come so unhappily between him and Adela. When he went to bid her good-bye, he found her alone, and she was reading this book. She spoke of it, and, in surprise that he had never read it, begged him to take it to Oxford.

'I have another copy,' Adela said. 'You can return that any time.'

The time had only now come. Hubert resolved to take the book to Wanley in the evening; if no other means offered, Mr. Wyvern would return it to the owner. Might he enclose a note? Instead of that, he wrote out from memory two of his own sonnets, the best of those he had recently composed under the influence of the 'Vita Nuova,' and shut them between the pages. Then he made the book into a parcel and addressed it.

He started for his walk at the same hour as

on the evening before. There was frost in the air, and already the stars were bright. As he drew near to Wanley, the road was deserted; his footfall was loud on the hard earth. The moon began to show her face over the dark top of Stanbury Hill, and presently he saw by the clear rays that the figure of a woman was a few yards ahead of him; he was overtaking her. As he drew near to her, she turned her head. He knew her at once, for it was Letty Tew. He had been used to meet Letty often at the Walthams'.

Evidently he was himself recognised; the girl swerved a little, as if to let him pass, and kept her head bent. He obeyed an impulse and spoke to her.

'I am afraid you have forgotten me, Miss Tew. Yet I don't like to pass you without saying a word.'

'I thought it was—the light makes it difficult——' Letty murmured, sadly embarrassed.

'But the moon is beautiful.'

'Very beautiful.'

They regarded it together. Letty could not help glancing at her companion, and as he did not turn his face she examined him for a moment or two.

'I am going to see my friend Mr. Wyvern,' Hubert proceeded.

A few more remarks of the kind were

exchanged, Letty by degrees summoning a cold confidence ; then Hubert said—

‘I have here a book which belongs to Miss Waltham. She lent it to me a year ago, and I wish to return it. Dare I ask you to put it into her hands?’

Letty knew what the book must be. Adela had told her of it at the time, and since had spoken of it once or twice.

‘Oh yes, I will give it her,’ she replied, rather nervously again.

‘Will you say that I would gladly have thanked her myself, if it had been possible?’

‘Yes, Mr. Eldon, I will say that.’

Something in Hubert’s voice seemed to cause Letty to raise her eyes again.

‘You wish me to thank her?’ she added, inconsequently perhaps, but with a certain significance.

‘If you will be so kind.’

Hubert wanted to say more, but found it difficult to discover the right words. Letty, too, tried to shadow forth something that was in her mind, but with no better success.

‘If I remember,’ Hubert said, pausing in his walk, ‘this stile will be my shortest way across to the Vicarage. Thank you much for your kindness.’

He had raised his hat and was turning, but Letty impulsively put forth her hand. ‘Good-

bye,' he said, in a friendly voice, as he took the little fingers. 'I wish the old days were back again, and we were going to have tea together as we used to.'

Mr. Wyvern's face gave no promise of cheerful intelligence as he welcomed his visitor.

'What is the origin of this, I wonder?' he said, handing Hubert the *Belwick Chronicle*.

The state of the young man's nerves was not well adapted to sustain fresh irritation. He turned pale with anger.

'Is this going the round of Wanley?'

'Probably. I had it from Mrs. Waltham.'

'Did you contradict it?'

'As emphatically as I could.'

'I will see the man who edits this to-morrow,' cried Hubert hotly. 'But perhaps he is too great a blackguard to talk with.'

'It purports to come, you see, from a London correspondent. But I suppose the source is nearer.'

'You mean—you think that man Mutimer has originated it?'

'I scarcely think that.'

'Yet it is more than likely. I will go to the Manor at once. At least he shall give me yes or no.'

He had started to his feet, but the vicar laid a hand on his shoulder.

'I'm afraid you can't do that.'

‘Why not?’

‘Consider. You have no kind of right to charge him with such a thing. And there is another reason: he proposed to Miss Waltham this morning, and she accepted him.’

‘This morning? And this paper is yesterday’s. Why, it makes it more likely than ever. How did they get the paper? Doubtless he sent it them. If she has accepted him this very day——’

The repetition of the words seemed to force their meaning upon him through his anger. His voice failed.

‘You tell me that Adela Waltham has engaged herself to that man?’

‘Her mother told me, only a few minutes after it occurred.’

‘Then it was this that led her to consent.’

‘Surely that is presupposing too much, my dear Eldon,’ said the vicar gently.

‘No, not more than I know to be true. I could not say that to anyone but you; you must understand me. The girl is being cheated into marrying that fellow. Of her own free will she could not do it. This is one of numberless lies. You are right; it’s no use to go to him: he wouldn’t tell the truth. But *she* must be told. How can I see her?’

‘It is more difficult than ever. Her having accepted him makes all the difference. Explain

it to yourself as you may, you cannot give her to understand that you doubt her sincerity.'

'But does she know that this story is false?'

'Yes, that she will certainly hear. I have busied myself in contradicting it. If Mrs. Waltham does not tell her, she will hear it from her friend Miss Tew, without question.'

Hubert pondered, then made the inquiry:

'How could I procure a meeting with Miss Tew? I met her just now on the road and spoke to her. I think she might consent to help me.'

Mr. Wyvern looked doubtful.

'You met her? She was coming from Agworth?'

'She seemed to be.'

'Her father and mother are gone to spend to-morrow with friends in Belwick; I suppose she drove into Wanley with them, and walked back.'

The vicar probably meant this for a suggestion; at all events, Hubert received it as one.

'Then I will simply call at the house. She may be alone. I can't weigh niceties.'

Mr. Wyvern made no reply. The announcement that dinner was ready allowed him to quit the subject. Hubert with difficulty sat through the meal, and as soon as it was over took his departure, leaving it uncertain whether he would return that evening. The vicar

offered no further remark on the subject of their thoughts, but at parting pressed the young man's hand warmly.

Hubert walked straight to the Tews' dwelling. The course upon which he had decided had disagreeable aspects and involved chances anything but pleasant to face; he had, however, abundance of moral courage, and his habitual scorn of petty obstacles was just now heightened by passionate feeling. He made his presence known at the house-door as though his visit were expected. Letty herself opened to him. It was Saturday night, and she thought the ring was Alfred Waltham's. Indeed she half uttered a few familiar words; then, recognising Hubert, she stood fixed in surprise.

'Will you allow me to speak with you for a few moments, Miss Tew?' Hubert said, with perfect self-possession. 'I ask your pardon for calling at this hour. My business is urgent; I have come without a thought of anything but the need of seeing you.'

'Will you come in, Mr. Eldon?'

She led him into a room where there was no fire, and only one lamp burning low.

'I'm afraid it's very cold here,' she said, with extreme nervousness. 'The other room is occupied—my sister and the children; I hope you——'

A little girl put in her face at the door,
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asking 'Is it Alfred?' Letty hurried her away, closed the door, and, whilst lighting two candles on the mantelpiece, begged her visitor to seat himself.

'If you will allow me, I will stand,' said Hubert. 'I scarcely know how to begin what I wish to say. It has reference to Miss Waltham. I wish to see her; I must, if she will let me, have an opportunity of speaking with her. But I have no direct means of letting her know my wish; doubtless you understand that. In my helplessness I have thought of you. Perhaps I am asking an impossibility. Will you—can you—repeat my words to Miss Waltham, and beg her to see me?'

Letty listened in sheer bewilderment. The position in which she found herself was so alarmingly novel, it made such a whirlpool in her quiet life, that it was all she could do to struggle with the throbbing of her heart and attempt to gather her thoughts. She did not even reflect that her eyes were fixed on Hubert's in a steady gaze. Only the sound of his voice after silence aided her to some degree of collectedness.

'There is every reason why you should accuse me of worse than impertinence,' Hubert continued, less impulsively. 'I can only ask your forgiveness. Miss Waltham may very

likely refuse to see me, but, if you would ask her——’

Letty was borne on a torrent of strange thoughts. How could this man, who spoke with such impressive frankness, with such persuasiveness, be the abandoned creature that she had of late believed him? With Adela's secret warm in her heart she could not but feel an interest in Hubert, and the interest was becoming something like zeal on his behalf. During the past two hours her mind had been occupied with him exclusively; his words when he left her at the stile had sounded so good and tender that she began to question whether there was any truth at all in the evil things said about him. The latest story had just been declared baseless by no less an authority than the vicar, who surely was not a man to maintain friendship with a worthless profligate. What did it all mean? She had heard only half an hour ago of Adela's positive acceptance of Mutimer, and was wretched about it; secure in her own love-match, it was the mystery of mysteries that Adela should consent to marry a man she could scarcely endure. And here a chance of rescue seemed to be offering; was it not her plain duty to give what help she might?

‘You have probably not seen her since I

gave you the book?' Hubert said, perceiving that Letty was quite at a loss for words.

'No, I haven't seen her at all to-day,' was the reply. 'Do you wish me to go to-night?'

'You consent to do me this great kindness?'

Letty blushed. Was she not committing herself too hastily?

'There cannot be any harm in giving your message,' she said, half interrogatively, her timidity throwing itself upon Hubert's honour.

'Surely no harm in that.'

'But do you know that she—have you heard——?'

'Yes, I know. She has accepted an offer of marriage. It was because I heard of it that I came to you. You are her nearest friend; you can speak to her as others would not venture to. I ask only for five minutes. I entreat her to grant me that.'

To add to her perturbation, Letty was in dread of hearing Alfred's ring at the door; she durst not prolong this interview.

'I will tell her,' she said. 'If I can, I will see her to-night.'

'And how can I hear the result? I am afraid to ask you—if you would write one line to me at Agworth? I am staying at my mother's house.'

He mentioned the address. Letty, who felt

herself caught up above the world of common experiences and usages, gave her promise as a matter of course.

‘I shall not try to thank you,’ Hubert said. ‘But you will not doubt that I am grateful?’

Letty said no more, and it was with profound relief that she heard the door close behind her visitor. But even yet the danger was not past; Alfred might at this moment be approaching, so as to meet Hubert near the house. And indeed this all but happened, for Mr. Waltham presented himself very soon. Letty had had time to impose secrecy on her sisters, such an extraordinary proceeding on her part that they were awed, and made faithful promise of discretion.

Letty drew her lover into the fireless room; she had blown out the candles and turned the lamp low again, fearful lest her face should display signs calling for comment.

‘I did so want you to come!’ she exclaimed. ‘Tell me about Adela.’

‘I don’t know that there’s anything to tell,’ was Alfred’s stolid reply. ‘It’s settled, that’s all. I suppose it’s all right.’

‘But you speak as if you thought it mightn’t be, Alfred?’

‘Didn’t know that I did. Well, I haven’t seen her since I got home. She’s upstairs.’

‘Can’t I see her to-night? I do so want to.’

‘I dare say she’d be glad.’

‘But what is it, my dear boy? I’m sure you speak as if you weren’t quite satisfied.’

‘The mater says it’s all right. I suppose she knows.’

‘But you’ve always been so anxious for it.’

‘Anxious? I haven’t been anxious at all. But I dare say it’s the wisest thing she could do. I like Mutimer well enough.’

‘Alfred, I don’t think he’s the proper husband for Adela.’

‘Why not? There’s not much chance that she’ll get a better.’

Alfred was manifestly less cheerful than usual. When Letty continued to tax him with it he grew rather irritable.

‘Go and talk to her yourself,’ he said at length. ‘You’ll find it’s all right. I don’t pretend to understand her; there’s so much religion mixed up with her doings, and I can’t stand that.’

Letty shook her head and sighed.

‘What a vile smell of candle-smoke there is here!’ Alfred cried. ‘And the room must be five or six degrees below zero. Let’s go to the fire.’

‘I think I shall run over to Adela at once,’ said Letty, as she followed him into the hall.

‘ All right. Don’t be vexed if she refuses to let you in. I’ll stay here with the youngsters a bit.’

The truth was that Alfred did feel a little uncomfortable this evening, and was not sorry to be away from the house for a short time. He was one of those young men who will pursue an end out of mere obstinacy, and who, through default of imaginative power, require an event to declare itself before they can appreciate the ways in which it will affect them. This marriage of his sister with a man of the working class had possibly, he now felt, other aspects than those which alone he had regarded whilst it was merely a matter for speculation. He was not seriously uneasy, but wished his mother had been somewhat less precipitate. Well, Adela could not be such a simpleton as to be driven entirely counter to her inclinations in an affair of so much importance. Girls were confoundedly hard to understand, in short ; probably they existed for the purpose of keeping one mentally active.

Letty found Mrs. Waltham sitting alone, she too seemingly not in the best of spirits. There was something depressing in the stillness of the house. Mrs. Waltham had her volume of family prayers open before her ; her handkerchief lay upon it.

‘ She is naturally a little—a little fluttered,’

she said, speaking of Adela. 'I hoped you would look in. Try and make her laugh, my dear ; that's all she wants.'

The girl tripped softly upstairs and softly knocked at Adela's door. At her 'May I come in?' the door was opened. Letty examined her friend with surprise ; in Adela's face there was no indication of trouble, rather the light of some great joy dwelt in her eyes. She embraced Letty tenderly. The two were as nearly as possible of the same age, but Letty had always regarded Adela in the light of an elder sister ; that feeling was very strong in her just now, as well as a diffidence greater than she had known before.

'Are you happy, darling?' she asked timidly.

'Yes, dear, I am happy. I believe, I am sure, I have done right. Take your hat off ; it's quite early. I've just been reading the collect for to-morrow. It's one of those I have never quite understood, but I think it's clearer to me now.'

They read over the prayer together, and spoke of it for a few minutes.

'What have you brought me?' Adela asked at length, noticing a little parcel in the other's hand.

'It's a book I have been asked to give you. I shall have to explain. Do you remember

lending — lending someone your “Christian Year”?’

The smile left Adela’s face and the muscles of her mouth strung themselves.

‘Yes, I remember,’ she replied coldly.

‘As I was walking back from Agworth this afternoon, he overtook me on the road and asked me to return it to you.’

‘Thank you, dear.’

Adela took the parcel and laid it aside. There was an awkward silence. Letty could not look up.

‘He was going to see Mr. Wyvern,’ she continued, as if anxious to lay stress on this. ‘He seems to know Mr. Wyvern very well.’

‘Yes? You didn’t miss Alfred, I hope. He went out a very short time ago.’

‘No, I saw him. He stayed with the others. But I have something more to tell you, about—about him.’

‘About Alfred?’

‘About Mr. Eldon.’

Adela looked at her friend with a grave surprise, much as a queen regards a favourite subject who has been over-bold.

‘I think we won’t talk of him, Letty,’ she said, from her height.

‘Do forgive me, Adela. I have promised to—to say something. There must have been a great many things said that were not true,

just like this about his marriage ; I am so sure of it.'

Adela endeavoured to let the remark pass without replying to it. But her thought expressed itself involuntarily.

'His marriage? What do you know of it?'

'Mr. Wyvern came to see mother this morning, and showed her a newspaper that your mother gave him. It said that Mr. Eldon was going to marry an actress, and Mr. Wyvern declared there was not a word of truth in it. But of course your mother told you that?'

Adela sat motionless. Mrs. Waltham had not troubled herself to make known the vicar's contradiction. But Adela could not allow herself to admit that. Finding her voice with difficulty, she said :

'It does not at all concern me.'

'But your mother *did* tell you, Adela?' Letty persisted, emboldened by a thought which touched upon indignation.

'Of course she did.'

The falsehood was uttered with cold deliberateness. There was nothing to show that a pang quivered on every nerve of the speaker.

'Who can have sent such a thing to the paper?' Letty exclaimed. 'There must be someone who wishes to do him harm. Adela, I don't believe *anything* that people have said!'

Even in speaking she was frightened at her own boldness. Adela's eyes had never regarded her with such a look as now.

‘Adela, my darling! Don't, don't be angry with me!’

She sprang forward and tried to put her arms about her friend, but Adela gently repelled her.

‘If you have promised to say something, Letty, you must keep your promise. Will you say it at once, and then let us talk of something else?’

Letty checked a tear. Her trustful and loving friend seemed changed to someone she scarcely knew. She too grew colder, and began her story in a lifeless way, as if it no longer possessed any interest.

‘Just when I had had tea and was expecting Alfred to come, somebody rang the bell. I went to the door myself, and it was Mr. Eldon. He had come to speak to me of you. He said he wanted to see you, that he *must* see you, and begged me to tell you that. That's all, Adela. I couldn't refuse him; I felt I had no right to; he spoke in such a way. But I am very sorry to have so displeased you, dear. I didn't think you would take anything amiss that I did in all sincerity. I am sure there has been some wretched mistake, something worse than a mistake, depend upon it. But I won't

say any more. And I think I'll go now, Adela.'

Adela spoke in a tone of measured gravity which was quite new in her.

'You have not displeased me, Letty. I don't think you have been to blame in any way; I am sure you had no choice but to do as he asked you. You have repeated all he said?'

'Yes, all; all the words, that is. There was something that I can't repeat.'

'And if I consented to see him, how was he to know?'

'I promised to write to him. He is staying at Agworth.'

'You mustn't do that, dear. I will write to him myself, then I can thank him for returning the book. What is his address?'

Letty gave it.

'It is, of course, impossible for me to see him,' pursued Adela, still in the same measured tones. 'If I write myself it will save you any more trouble. Forget it, if I seemed unkind, dear.'

'Adela, I can't forget it. You are not like yourself, not at all. Oh, how I wish this had happened sooner! Why—why can't you see him, darling? I think you ought to; I do really think so.'

‘I must be the best judge of that, Letty. Please let us speak of it no more.’

The sweet girl-face was adamant, its expression a proud virginity; an ascetic sternness moulded the small, delicate lips. Letty’s countenance could never have looked like that.

Left to herself again, Adela took the parcel upon her lap and sat dreaming. It was long before her face relaxed; when it did so, the mood that succeeded was profoundly sorrowful. One would have said that it was no personal grief that absorbed her, but compassion for the whole world’s misery.

When at length she undid the wrapping, her eye was at once caught by the papers within the volume. She started, and seemed afraid to touch the book. Her first thought was that Eldon had enclosed a letter; but she saw that there was no envelope, only two or three loose slips. At length she examined them and found the sonnets. They had no heading, but at the foot of each was written the date of composition.

She read them. Adela’s study of poetry had not gone beyond a school-book of selections, with the works of Mrs. Hemans and of Longfellow, and the ‘Christian Year.’ Hubert’s verses she found difficult to understand; their spirit, the very vocabulary, was strange to her. Only on a second reading did she attain a

glimmering of their significance. Then she folded them again and laid them on the table.

Before going to her bedroom she wrote this letter :

‘DEAR MR. ELDON,—I am much obliged to you for returning the ‘Christian Year.’ Some papers were left in its pages by accident, and I now enclose them.

‘Miss Tew also brought me a message from you. I am sorry that I cannot do as you wish. I am unable to ask you to call, and I hope you will understand me when I say that any other kind of meeting is impossible.

‘I am, yours truly,

‘ADELA WALTHAM.’

It was Adela’s first essay in this vein of composition. The writing cost her an hour, and she was far from satisfied with the final form. But she copied it in a firm hand, and made it ready for posting on the morrow.

CHAPTER II.

‘BETWEEN Richard Mutimer, bachelor, and Adela Marian Waltham, spinster, both of this parish.’

It was the only announcement of the kind that Mr. Wyvern had to make this Sunday. To one of his hearers he seemed to utter the names with excessive emphasis, his deep voice reverberating in the church. The pews were high; Adela almost covered in her corner, feeling pierced with the eyes, with the thoughts too, of the congregation about her.

She had wondered whether the Manor pew would be occupied to-day, but it was not. When she stood up, her eyes strayed towards it; the red curtains which concealed the interior were old and faded, the wooden canopy crowned it with dreary state. In three weeks that would be her place at service. Sitting there, it would not be hard to keep her thoughts on mortality.

Would it not have been graceful in him to

attend church to-day? Would she in future worship under the canopy alone?

No time had been lost. Mr. Wyvern received notice of the proposed marriage less than two hours after Adela had spoken her world-changing monosyllable. She put in no plea for delay, and her mother, though affecting a little consternation at Mutimer's haste, could not seriously object. Wanley, discussing the matter at its Sunday tea-tables, declared with unanimity that such expedition was indecent. By this time the disapproval of the village had attached itself exclusively to Mrs. Waltham; Adela was spoken of as a martyr to her mother's miserable calculations. Mrs. Mewling went about with a story, that only by physical restraint had the unhappy girl been kept from taking flight. The name of Hubert Eldon once more came up in conversation. There was an unauthenticated rumour that he had been seen of late, lurking about Wanley. The more boldly speculative gossips looked with delicious foreboding to the results of a marriage such as this. Given a young man of Eldon's reputation—ah me!

The Walthams all lunched (or dined) at the Manor. Mutimer was in high spirits, or seemed so; there were moments when the cheerful look died on his face, and his thoughts wandered from the conversation; but if his eye fell on Adela he never failed to smile the smile

of inner satisfaction. She had not yet responded to his look, and only answered his questions in the briefest words ; but her countenance was resolutely bright, and her beauty all that man could ask. Richard did not flatter himself that she held him dear ; indeed, he was a good deal in doubt whether affection, as vulgarly understood, was consistent with breeding and education. But that did not concern him ; he had gained his end, and was jubilant.

In the course of the meal he mentioned that his sister would come down from London in a day or two. Christmas was only a week off, and he had thought it would be pleasant to have her at the Manor for that season.

‘Oh, that’s very nice!’ assented Mrs. Waltham. ‘Alice, her name is, didn’t you say? Is she dark or fair?’

‘Fair, and just about Adela’s height, I should think. I hope you’ll like her, Adela.’

It was unfortunate that Richard did not pronounce the name of his bride elect quite as it sounds on cultured lips. This may have been partly the result of diffidence ; but there was a slurring of the second syllable disagreeably suggestive of vulgarity. It struck on the girl’s nerves, and made it more difficult for her to grow accustomed to this form of address from Mutimer.

‘I’m sure I shall try to,’ she replied to the remark about Alice, this time endeavouring to fix her obstinate eyes for a moment on Richard’s face.

‘Your brother won’t come, then?’ Mrs. Waltham asked.

‘Not just yet, I’m afraid. He’s busy studying.’

‘To read and write, I fear,’ was the lady’s silent comment. On the score of Alice, too, Mrs. Waltham nursed a certain anxiety. The damsels of the working class are, or so she apprehended, somewhat more difficult of acceptance than their fathers and brothers, and for several reasons. An artisan does not necessarily suggest, indeed is very distinct from, the footman or even groom; but to dissociate an uneducated maiden from the lower regions of the house is really an exertion of the mind. And then, it is to be feared, the moral tone of such young persons leaves for the most part much to be desired. Mrs. Waltham was very womanly in her distrust of her sex.

After luncheon there was an inspection of the house. Adela did not go farther than the drawing-room; her brother remained with her whilst Mutimer led Mrs. Waltham through the chambers she might care to see. The lady expressed much satisfaction. The furnishing had been performed in a substantial manner,

without display; one might look forward to considerable comfort at the Manor.

‘Any change that Adela suggests,’ said Richard during this tour, ‘shall of course be carried out at once. If she doesn’t like the paper in any of the rooms, she’s only got to say so and choose a better. Do you think she’d care to look at the stables? I’ll get a carriage for her, and a horse to ride, if she likes.’

Richard felt strongly that this was speaking in a generous way. He was not aware that his tone hinted as much, but it unmistakably did. The vulgarity of a man who tries hard not to be vulgar is always particularly distressing.

‘Oh, how kind!’ murmured Mrs. Waltham. ‘Adela has never ridden; I should think carriage exercise would be enough for her. We mustn’t forget your principles, you know, for I’m sure they are very admirable.’

‘Oh, I don’t care anything about luxuries myself, but Adela shall have everything she wants.’

Alfred Waltham, who knew the house perfectly, led his mother to inspect the stables, Mutimer remaining with Adela in the drawing-room.

‘You’ve been very quiet all dinner-time,’ he said, taking a seat near her and bending forward,

‘A little, perhaps. I am thinking of so many things.’

‘What are they, I wonder?’

‘Will you let me have some books about Socialism, and the other questions in which you are interested?’

‘I should think I will! You really mean to study these things?’

‘Yes, I will read and think about them. And I shall be glad if you will explain to me more about the works. I have never quite understood all that you wish to do. Perhaps you will have time when you come to see us some evening.’

‘Well, if I haven’t time, I’ll make it,’ said Richard, laughing. ‘You can’t think how glad I am to hear you say this.’

‘When do you expect your sister?’

‘On Tuesday; at least, I hope it won’t be later. I’m sure you’ll like her, you can’t help. She hasn’t such looks as you have, you know, but we’ve always thought her very fair-looking. What do you think we often call her? The Princess! That’s part because of her name, Alice Maud, and part from a sort of way she’s always had. Not a flighty way, but a sort of—well, I can’t describe it. I do hope you’ll like her.’

It was the first time Adela had heard him speak in a tone which impressed her as entirely

honest, not excepting his talk of the Propaganda. Here, she felt, was a side of his character that she had not suspected. His voice was almost tender; the play of his features betokened genuine feeling.

‘I can see she is a great favourite with you,’ she replied. ‘I have no doubt I shall like her.’

‘You’ll find a good deal that wants altering, I’ve no doubt,’ he pursued, now quite forgetful of himself. ‘She hasn’t had much education, you know, till just lately. But you’ll help her in that, won’t you? She’s as good-natured as any girl living, and whenever you put her right you may be sure she’ll only thank you. I’ve wanted to have her here before, only I thought I’d wait till I knew whether—you know what I mean.’

As if in a sudden gloom before her eyes Adela saw his face draw nearer. It was a moment’s loss of consciousness, in which a ghastly fear flashed upon her soul. Then, with lips that quivered, she began to talk quickly of Socialism, just to dispel the horror.

On the following afternoon Mutimer came, bringing a number of books, pamphlets, and newspapers. Mrs. Waltham had discreetly abandoned the sitting-room.

‘I don’t want to frighten you,’ he said, laying down his bundle. ‘You haven’t got to read through all these. I was up nearly all

last night marking pages that I thought you'd better study first of all. And here's a lot of back numbers of the *Fiery Cross*; I should like you to read all that's signed by Mr. Westlake; he's the editor, you know.'

'Is there anything here of your own writing?' Adela inquired.

'No, I haven't written anything. I've kept to lecturing; it comes easier to me. After Christmas I shall have several lectures to give in London. Perhaps you'll come and hear me?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Then you can get to know Mrs. Westlake, I dare say. She's a lady, you know, like yourself. There's some poetry by her in the paper; it just has her initials, "S. W." She's with us heart and soul, as you'll see by her writing.'

'Is Alice a Socialist?' Adela asked, after glancing fitfully at the papers.

Richard laughed.

'Oh, she's a princess; it would be too much to expect Socialism of her. But I dare say she'll be beginning to think more now. I don't mean she's been thoughtless in the wrong way; it's just a—I can't very well describe it. But I hope you'll see her to-morrow night. May I bring her to you when she comes?'

'I hope you will.'

‘I’m glad your brother won’t be here. I only mean, you know, I’d rather she got accustomed just to you first of all. I dare say she’ll be a bit timid, you won’t mind that?’

Adela returned to the graver subject.

‘All the people at New Wanley are Socialists?’

‘Yes, all of them. They join the Union when they come to work, and we take a good deal of care in choosing our men.’

‘And you pay higher wages than other employers?’

‘Not much higher, but the rents of the cottages are very low, and all the food sold at the store is cost price. No, we don’t pretend to make the men rich. We’ve had a good lot coming with quite mistaken ideas, and of course they wouldn’t suit us. And you mustn’t call me the employer. All I have I look upon as the property of the Union; the men own it as much as I do. It’s only that I regulate the work, just because somebody must. We’re not making any profits to speak of yet, but that’ll only come in time; whatever remains as clear profit,—and I don’t take anything out of the works myself—goes to the Propaganda fund of the Union.’

‘Please forgive my ignorance. I’ve heard that word “Propaganda” so often, but I don’t know exactly what it means.’

Mutimer became patronising, quite without intending it.

‘Propaganda? Oh, that’s the spreading our ideas, you know; printing paper, giving lectures, hiring places of meeting, and so on. That’s what Propaganda means.’

‘Thank you,’ said Adela musingly. Then she continued,—

‘And the workmen only have the advantage, at present, of the low rents and cheap food?’

‘Oh, a good deal more. To begin with, they’re housed like human beings, and not like animals. Some day you shall see the kind of places the people live in, in London and other big towns. You won’t believe your eyes. Then they have shorter hours of work; they’re not treated like omnibus horses, calculating just how much can be got out of them without killing them before a reasonable time. Then they’re sure of their work as long as they keep honest and don’t break any of our rules; that’s no slight thing, I can tell you. Why, on the ordinary system a man may find himself and his family without food any week end. Then there’s a good school for the children; they pay threepence a week for each child. Then there’s the reading-room and library, and the lectures, and the recreation-grounds. You just come over the place with me some day, and

talk with the women, and see if they don't think they're well off.'

Adela looked him in the face.

'And it is you they have to thank for all this?'

'Well, I don't want any credit for it,' Mutimer replied, waving his hand. 'What would you think of me if I worked them like niggers and just enjoyed myself on the profits? That's what the capitalists do.'

'I think you are doing more than most men would. There is only one thing.'

She dropped her voice.

'What's that, Adela?'

'I'll speak of it some other time.'

'I know what you mean. You're sorry I've got no religion. Ay, but I have! There's my religion, down there in New Wanley. I'm saving men and women and children from hunger and cold and the lives of brute beasts. I teach them to live honestly and soberly. There's no public-house in New Wanley, and there won't be.' (It just flashed across Adela's mind that Mutimer drank wine himself.) 'There's no bad language if I can help it. The children 'll be brought up to respect the human nature that's in them, to honour their parents, and act justly and kindly to all they have dealings with. Isn't there a good deal of religion in that, Adela?'

‘Yes, but not all. Not the most important part.’

‘Well, as you say, we’ll talk over that some other time. And now I’m sorry I can’t stay any longer. I’ve twenty or thirty letters to get written before post-time.’

Adela rose as he did.

‘If there’s ever anything I can do to help you,’ she said modestly, ‘you will not fail to ask me?’

‘That I won’t. What I want you to do now is to read what I’ve marked in those books. You mustn’t tire your eyes, you know; there’s plenty of time.’

‘I will read all you wish me to, and think over it as much as I can.’

‘Then you’re a right-down good girl, and if I don’t think myself a lucky man, I ought to.’

He left her trembling with a strange new emotion, the beginning of a self-conscious zeal, an enthusiasm forced into being like a hothouse flower. It made her cheeks burn; she could not rest till her study had commenced.

Richard had written to his sister, saying that he wanted her, that she must come at once. To Alice his thoughts had been long turning; now that the time for action had arrived, it was to her that he trusted for aid. Things he would find it impossible to do himself, Alice might do for him. He did not

doubt his power of persuading her. With Alice principle would stand second to his advantage. He had hard things to ask of her, but the case was a desperate 'one, and she would endure the unpleasantness for his sake. He blessed her in anticipation.

Alice received the letter summoning her on Monday morning. Richard himself was expected in Highbury; expected, too, at a sad little house in Hoxton; for he had constantly promised to spend Christmas with his friends. The present letter did not say that he would not come, only that he wanted his sister immediately. She was to bring her best dress for wear when she arrived. He told her the train she was to take on Tuesday morning.

The summons filled Alice with delight. Wanley, whence had come the marvellous fortune, was in her imagination a land flowing with milk and honey. Moreover, this would be her first experience of travel; as yet she had never been farther out of London than to Epping Forest. The injunction to bring her best dress excited visions of polite company. All through Monday she practised ways of walking, of eating, of speaking.

'What can he want you for?' asked Mrs. Mutimer gloomily. 'I sh'd 'a thought he might 'a taken you with him after Christmas. It looks as if he wasn't coming.'

The old woman had been habitually gloomy of late. The reply she had received to her letter was not at all what she wanted; it increased her impatience; she had read it endless times, trying to get at the very meaning of it. Christmas must bring an end to this wretched state of things; at Christmas Dick would come to London and marry Emma; no doubt he had that time in view. Fears which she would not consciously admit were hovering about her night and day. She had begun to talk to herself aloud, a consequence of over-stress on a brain never used to anxious thought; she went about the upper rooms of the house muttering, 'Dick's an honest man.' To keep moving seemed a necessity to her; the chair in the dim corner of the dining-room she now scarcely ever occupied, and the wonted employment of her fingers was in abeyance. She spent most of her day in the kitchen; already two servants had left because they could not endure her fidgety supervision. She was growing suspicious of every one; Alice had to listen ten times a day to complaints of dishonesty in the domestics or the tradespeople; the old woman kept as keen a watch over petty expenditure as if poverty had still to be guarded against. And she was constantly visiting the Vines; she would rise at small hours to get her house-work done, so as to be able to spend the afternoon in Wilton Square. That, in truth,

was still her home; the new house could never be to her what the old was; she was a stranger amid the new furniture, and sighed with relief as soon as her eyes rested on the familiar chairs and tables which had been her household gods through a lifetime.

'Arry had given comparatively little trouble of late; beyond an occasional return home an hour or so after midnight, his proceedings seemed to be perfectly regular. He saw a good deal of Mr. Keene, who, as Alice gathered from various remarks in Richard's letters, exercised over him a sort of tutorage. It was singular how completely Richard seemed to have changed in his judgment of Mr. Keene. 'His connection with newspapers makes him very useful,' said one letter. 'Be as friendly with him as you like; I trust to your good sense and understanding of your own interests to draw the line.' When at the house Mr. Keene was profoundly respectful; his position at such times was singular, for as often as not Alice had to entertain him alone. Profound, too, was the journalist's discretion in regard to all doings down at Wanley. Knowing he had several times visited the Manor, Alice often sought information from him about her brother's way of life. Mr. Keene always replied with generalities. He was a man of humour in his way, and Alice came to regard him with amuse-

ment. Then his extreme respect flattered her ; insensibly she took him for her criterion of gentility in men. He supplied her with 'society' journals, and now and then suggested the new novel that it behoved her to read. Richard had even withdrawn his opposition to the theatre-going ; about once in three weeks Mr. Keene presented himself with tickets, and Alice, accompanied by her brother, accepted his invitation.

He called this Monday evening. Mrs. Mutimer, after spending a day of fretful misery, had gone to Wilton Square ; 'Arry was away at his classes. Alice was packing certain articles she had purchased in the afternoon, and had just delighted her soul with the inspection of a travelling cloak, also bought to-day. When the visitor was announced, she threw the garment over her shoulders and appeared in it.

'Does this look nice, do you think ?' she asked, after shaking hands as joyously as her mood dictated.

'About as nice as a perfect thing always does when it's worn by a perfect woman,' Mr. Keene replied, drawing back and inclining his body at what he deemed a graceful angle.

'Oh, come, that's too much!' laughed Alice.

'Not a bit, Miss Mutimer. I suppose you travel in it to-morrow morning ?'

'How did you know that ?'

‘I have heard from your brother to-day. I thought I might perhaps have the great pleasure of doing you some slight service either to-night or in the morning. You will allow me to attend you to the station?’

‘I really don’t think there’s any need to trouble you,’ Alice replied. These respectful phrases always stirred her pleasantly; in listening to them she bore herself with dignity, and endeavoured to make answer in becoming diction.

‘Trouble? What other object have I in life but to serve you? I’ll put it in another way: you won’t refuse me the pleasure of being near you for a few minutes?’

‘I’m sure you’re very kind. I know very well it’s taking you out of your way, but it isn’t likely I shall refuse to let you come.’

Mr. Keene bowed low in silence.

‘Have you brought me that paper?’ Alice asked, seating herself with careful arrangement of her dress. ‘The Christmas number with the ghost story you spoke of, you know?’

In the course of a varied life Mr. Keene had for some few months trodden the boards of provincial theatres; an occasional turn of his speech, and still more his favourite gestures, bore evidence to that period of his career. Instead of making direct reply to Alice’s question, he stood for a moment as if dazed;

then flinging back his body, smote his forehead with a ringing slap, and groaned 'O Heaven!'

'What's the matter?' cried the girl, not quite knowing whether to be amused or alarmed.

But Mr. Keene was rushing from the room, and in an instant the house door sounded loudly behind him. Alice stood disconcerted; then, thinking she understood, laughed gaily and ran upstairs to complete her packing. In a quarter of an hour Mr. Keene's return brought her to the drawing-room again. The journalist was propping himself against the mantelpiece, gasping, his arms hanging limp, his hair disordered. As Alice approached he staggered forward, fell on one knee, and held to her the paper she had mentioned.

'Pardon—forgive!' he panted.

'Why, where ever have you been?' exclaimed Alice.

'No matter! what are time and space? Forgive me, Miss Mutimer! I deserve to be turned out of the house, and never stand in the light of your countenance again.'

'But how foolish! As if it mattered all that. What a state you're in! I'll go and get you a glass of wine.'

She ran to the dining-room, and returned with a decanter and glass on a tray. Mr. Keene had sunk upon a settee, one arm hanging over the back, his eyes closed.

‘You have pardoned me?’ he murmured, regarding her with weary rapture.

‘I don’t see what there is to pardon. Do drink a glass of wine! Shall I pour it out for you?’

‘Drink and service for the gods!’

‘Do you mean the people in the gallery?’ Alice asked roguishly, recalling a term in which Mr. Keene had instructed her at their latest visit to the theatre.

‘You are as witty as you are beautiful!’ he sighed, taking the glass and draining it. Alice turned away to the fire; decidedly Mr. Keene was in a gallant mood this evening; hitherto his compliments had been far more guarded.

They began to converse in a more terrestrial manner. Alice wanted to know whom she was likely to meet at Wanley; and Mr. Keene, in a light way, sketched for her the Waltham family. She became thoughtful whilst he was describing Adela Waltham, and subsequently recurred several times to that young lady. The journalist allowed himself to enter into detail, and Alice almost ceased talking.

It drew on to half-past nine. Mr. Keene never exceeded discretion in the hours of his visits. He looked at his watch and rose.

‘I may call at nine?’ he said.

‘If you really have time. But I can manage quite well by myself, you know.’

‘What you *can* do is not the question. If I had my will you should never know a moment’s trouble as long as you lived.’

‘If I never have worse trouble than going to the railway station, I shall think myself lucky.’

‘Miss Mutimer——’

‘Yes?’

‘You won’t drop me altogether from your mind whilst you’re away?’

There was a change in his voice. He had abandoned the tone of excessive politeness, and spoke very much like a man who has feeling at the back of his words. Alice regarded him nervously.

‘I’m not going to be away more than a day or two,’ she said, smoothing a fold in her dress.

‘If it was only an hour or two I couldn’t bear to think you’d altogether forgotten me.’

‘Why, of course I shan’t!’

‘But—— Miss Mutimer, I’m abusing confidence. Your brother trusts me; he’s done me a good many kindnesses. But I can’t help it, upon my soul. If you betray me, I’m done for. You won’t do that? I put myself in your power, and you’re too good to hurt a fly.’

‘What do you mean, Mr. Keene?’ Alice

asked, inwardly pleased, yet feeling uncomfortable.

‘I can’t go away to-night without saying it, and ten to one it means I shall never see you again. You know what I mean. Well, harm me as you like ; I’d rather be harmed by you than done good to by any one else. I’ve got so far, there’s no going back. Do you think some day you could—do you think you *could* ?’

Alice dropped her eyes and shook her pretty head slowly.

‘I can’t give any promise of that kind,’ she replied under her breath.

‘You hate me? I’m a disagreeable beast to you? I’m a low——’

‘Oh dear, don’t say such things, Mr. Keene! The idea! I don’t dislike you a bit; but of course that’s a different thing——’

He held out his hand sadly, dashing the other over his eyes.

‘Good-bye, I don’t think I can come again. I’ve abused confidence. When your brother hears of it—— But no matter, I’m only a—a sort of crossing-sweeper in your eyes.’

Alice’s laugh rang merrily.

‘What things you do call yourself! Now, don’t go off like that, Mr. Keene. To begin with, my brother won’t hear anything about it——’

‘You mean that? You are so noble, so

forgiving? Pooh, as if I didn't know you were! Upon my soul, I'd run from here to South Kensington, like the ragamuffins after the cabs with luggage, only just to get a smile from you. Oh, Miss Mutimer——oh!

'Mr. Keene, I can't say yes, and I don't like to be so unkind to you as to say no. You'll let that do for the present, won't you?'

'Bless your bright eyes, of course I will! If I don't love you for your own sake, I'm the wretchedest turnip-snatcher in London. Good-bye, Princess!'

'Who taught you to call me that?'

'Taught me? It was only a word that came naturally to my lips.'

Curiously, this was quite true. It impressed Alice Maud, and she thought of Mr. Keene for at least five minutes continuously after his departure.

She was extravagantly gay as they drove in a four-wheeled cab to the station next morning. Mr. Keene made no advances. He sat respectfully on the seat opposite her, with a travelling bag on his knees, and sighed occasionally. When she had secured her seat in the railway carriage he brought her sandwiches, buns, and sweetmeats enough for a voyage to New York. Alice waved her hand to him as the train moved away.

She reached Agworth at one o'clock;

Richard had been pacing the platform impatiently for twenty minutes. Porters were eager to do his bidding, and his instructions to them were suavely imperative.

‘They know me,’ he remarked to Alice, with his air of satisfaction. ‘I suppose you’re half frozen? I’ve got a foot-warmer in the trap.’

The carriage promised to Adela was a luxury Richard had not ventured to allow himself. Alice mounted to a seat by his side, and he drove off.

‘Why on earth did you come second-class?’ he asked, after examining her attire with approval.

‘Ought it to have been first? It really seemed such a lot of money, Dick, when I came to look at the fares.’

‘Yes, it ought to have been first. In London things don’t matter, but here I’m known, you see. Did mother go to the station with you?’

‘No, Mr. Keene did.’

‘Keene, eh?’ He bent his brows a moment.

‘I hope he behaves himself?’

‘I’m sure he’s very gentlemanly.’

‘Yes, you ought to have come first-class. A princess riding second’ll never do. You look well, old girl! Glad to come, eh?’

‘Well, guess! And is this your own horse and trap, Dick?’

‘Of course it is.’

‘Who was that man? He touched his hat to you.’

Mutimer glanced back carelessly.

‘I’m sure I don’t know. Most people touch their hats to me about here.’

It was an ideal winter day. A feathering of snow had fallen at dawn, and now the clear, cold sun made it sparkle far and wide. The horse’s tread rang on the frozen highway. A breeze from the north-west chased the blood to healthsome leaping, and caught the breath like an unexpected kiss. The colour was high on Alice’s fair cheeks; she laughed with delight.

‘Oh, Dick, what a thing it is to be rich! And you do look such a gentleman; it’s those gloves, I think.’

‘Now we’re going into the village,’ Mutimer said presently. ‘Don’t look about you too much, and don’t seem to be asking questions. Everybody’ll be at the windows.’

CHAPTER III.

BETWEEN the end of the village street and the gates of the Manor, Mutimer gave his sister hasty directions as to her behaviour before the servants.

‘Put on just a bit of the princess,’ he said. ‘Not too much, you know, but just enough to show that it isn’t the first time in your life that you’ve been waited on. Don’t always give a ‘thank you;’ one every now and then ’ll do. I wouldn’t smile too much or look pleased, whatever you see. Keep that all till we’re alone together. We shall have lunch at once; I’ll do most of the talking whilst the servants are about; you just answer quietly.’

These instructions were interesting, but not altogether indispensable; Alice Maud had by this time a very pretty notion of how to conduct herself in the presence of menials. The trying moment was on entering the house; it was very hard indeed not to utter her astonishment and delight at the dimensions of the hall

and the handsome staircase. This point safely passed, she resigned herself to splendour, and was conducted to her room in a sort of romantic vision. The Manor satisfied her idea of the ancestral mansion so frequently described or alluded to in the fiction of her earlier years. If her mind had just now reverted to Mr. Keene, which of course it did not, she would have smiled very royally indeed.

When she entered the drawing-room, clad in that best gown which her brother had needlessly requested her to bring, and saw that Richard was standing on the hearth-rug quite alone, she could no longer contain herself, but bounded towards him like a young fawn, and threw her arms on his neck.

‘Oh, Dick,’ she whispered, ‘what a thing it is to be rich! How ever did we live so long in the old way! If I had to go back to it now I should die of misery.’

‘Let’s have a look at you,’ he returned, holding her at arm’s length. ‘Yes, I think that ’ll about do. Now mind you don’t let them see that you’re excited about it. Sit down here and pretend to be a bit tired. They may come and say lunch is ready any moment.’

‘Dick, I never felt so good in my life! I should like to go about the streets and give sovereigns to everybody I met.’

Richard laughed loudly.

‘Well, well, there’s better ways than that. I’ve been giving a good many sovereigns for a long time now. I’m only sorry you weren’t here when we opened the Hall.’

‘But you haven’t told me why you sent for me now.’

‘All right, we’ve got to have a long talk presently. It isn’t all as jolly as you think, but I can’t help that.’

‘Why, what can be wrong, Dick?’

‘Never mind; it’ll all come out in time.’

Alice came back upon certain reflections which had occupied her earlier in the morning; they kept her busy through luncheon. Whilst she ate, Richard observed her closely; on the whole he could not perceive a great difference between her manners and Adela’s. Difference there was, but in details to which Mutimer was not very sensitive. He kept up talk about the works for the most part, and described certain difficulties concerning rights of way which had of late arisen in the vicinity of the industrial settlement.

‘I think you shall come and sit with me in the library,’ he said as they rose from table. And he gave orders that coffee should be served to them in that room.

The library did not as yet quite justify its name. There was only one bookcase, and not more than fifty volumes stood on its

shelves. But a large writing-table was well covered with papers. There were no pictures on the walls, a lack which was noticeable throughout the house. The effect was a certain severity; there was no air of home in the spacious chambers; the walls seemed to frown upon their master, the hearths were cold to him as to an intruding alien. Perhaps Alice felt something of this; on entering the library she shivered a little, and went to warm her hands at the fire.

‘Sit in this deep chair,’ said her brother. ‘I’ll have a cigarette. How’s mother?’

‘Well, she hasn’t been quite herself,’ Alice replied, gazing into the fire. ‘She can’t get to feel at home, that’s the truth of it. She goes very often to the old house.’

‘Goes very often to the old house, does she?’

He repeated the words mechanically, watching smoke that issued from his lips. ‘Suppose she’ll get all right in time.’

When the coffee arrived a decanter of cognac accompanied it. Richard had got into the habit of using the latter rather freely of late. He needed a stimulant in view of the conversation that was before him. The conversation was difficult to begin. For a quarter of an hour he strayed over subjects, each of which, he thought, might bring him to the

point. A question from Alice eventually gave him the requisite impulse.

‘What’s the bad news you’ve got to tell me, Dick?’ she asked shyly.

‘Bad news? Why, yes, I suppose it is bad, and it’s no use pretending anything else. I’ve brought you down here just to tell it you. Somebody must know first, and it had better be somebody who’ll listen patiently, and perhaps help me to get over it. I don’t know quite how you’ll take it, Alice. For anything I can tell, you may get up and be off, and have nothing more to do with me.’

‘Why, what ever can it be, Dick? Don’t talk nonsense. You’re not afraid of *me*, I should think.’

‘Yes, I am a bit afraid of you, old girl. It isn’t a nice thing to tell you, and there’s the long and short of it. I’m hanged if I know how to begin.’

He laughed in an irresolute way. Trying to light a new cigarette from the remnants of the one he had smoked, his hands shook. Then he had recourse again to cognac.

Alice was drumming with her foot on the floor. She sat forward, her arms crossed upon her lap. Her eyes were still on the fire.

‘Is it anything about Emma, Dick?’ she asked, after a disconcerting silence.

‘Yes, it is.’

‘Hadn’t you better tell me at once? It isn’t at all nice to feel like this.’

‘Well, I’ll tell you. I can’t marry Emma; I’m going to marry some one else.’

Alice was prepared, but the plain words caused her a moment’s consternation.

‘Oh, what ever will they all say, Dick?’ she exclaimed in a low voice.

‘That’s bad enough, to be sure, but I think more about Emma herself. I feel ashamed of myself, and that’s the plain truth. Of course I shall always give her and her sisters all the money they want to live upon, but that isn’t altogether a way out. If only I could have hinted something to her before now. I’ve let it go on so long. I’m going to be married in a fortnight.’

He could not look Alice in the face, nor she him. His shame made him angry; he flung the half-smoked cigarette violently into the fireplace, and began to walk about the room. Alice was speaking, but he did not heed her, and continued with impatient loudness.

‘Who the devil could imagine what was going to happen? Look here, Alice; if it hadn’t been for mother, I shouldn’t have engaged myself to Emma. I shouldn’t have cared much in the old kind of life; she’d have suited me very well. You can say all the good about her you like, I know it’ll be true. It’s a cursed

shame to treat her in this way, I don't need telling that. But it wouldn't do as things are; why, you can see for yourself—would it now? And that's only half the question: I'm going to marry somebody I do really care for. What's the good of keeping my word to Emma, only to be miserable myself and make her the same? It's the hardest thing ever happened to a man. Of course I shall be blackguarded right and left. Do I deserve it now? Can I help it?'

It was not quite consistent with the tone in which he had begun, but it had the force of a genuine utterance. To this Richard had worked himself in fretting over his position; he was the real sufferer, though decency compelled him to pretend it was not so. He had come to think of Emma almost angrily; she was a clog on him, and all the more irritating because he knew that his brute strength, if only he might exert it, could sweep her into nothingness at a blow. The quietness with which Alice accepted his revelation encouraged him in self-defence. He talked on for several minutes, walking about and swaying his arms, as if in this way he could literally shake himself free of moral obligations. Then, finding his throat dry, he had recourse to cognac, and Alice could at length speak.

'You haven't told me, Dick, who it is you're going to marry.'

‘A lady called Miss Waltham — Adela Waltham. She lives here in Wanley.’

‘Does she know about Emma?’

The question was simply put, but it seemed to affect Richard very disagreeably.

‘No, of course she doesn’t. What would be the use?’

He threw himself into a chair, crossed his feet, and kept silence.

‘I’m very sorry for Emma,’ murmured his sister.

Richard said nothing.

‘How shall you tell her, Dick?’

‘I can’t tell her!’ he replied, throwing out an arm. ‘How is it likely I can tell her?’

‘And Jane’s so dreadfully bad,’ continued Alice in the undertone. ‘She’s always saying she cares for nothing but to see Emma married. What *shall* we do? And everything seemed so first-rate. Suppose she summonses you, Dick?’

The noble and dignified legal process whereby maidens right themselves naturally came into Alice’s thoughts. Her brother scouted the suggestion.

‘Emma’s not that kind of girl. Besides, I’ve told you I shall always send her money. She’ll find another husband before long. Lots of men ’ud be only too glad to marry her.’

Alice was not satisfied with her brother.

The practical aspects of the rupture she could consider leniently, but the tone he assumed was jarring to her instincts. Though nothing like a warm friendship existed between her and Emma, she sympathised, in a way impossible to Richard, with the sorrows of the abandoned girl. She was conscious of what her judgment would be if another man had acted thus; and though this was not so much a matter of consciousness, she felt that Richard might have spoken in a way more calculated to aid her in taking his side. She wished, in fact, to see only his advantage, and was very much tempted to see everything but that.

‘But you can’t keep her in the dark any longer,’ she urged. ‘Why, it’s cruel!’

‘I can’t tell her,’ he repeated monotonously.

Alice drew in her feet. It symbolised retiring within her defences. She saw what he was aiming at, and felt not at all disposed to pleasure him. There was a long silence; Alice was determined not to be the first to break it.

‘You refuse to help me?’ Richard asked at length, between his teeth.

‘I think it would be every bit as bad for me as for you,’ she replied.

‘That you can’t think,’ he argued. ‘She can’t blame you; you’ve only to say I’ve behaved like a blackguard, and you’re out of it.’

‘ And when do you mean to tell mother? ’

‘ She’ll have to hear of it from other people. I can’t tell her.’

Richard had a suspicion that he was irretrievably ruining himself in his sister’s opinion, and it did not improve his temper. It was a foretaste of the wider obloquy to come upon him, possibly as hard to bear as any condemnation to which he had exposed himself. He shook himself out of the chair.

‘ Well, that’s all I’ve got to tell you. Perhaps you’d better think over it. I don’t want to keep you away from home longer than you care to stay. There’s a train at a few minutes after nine in the morning.’

He shuffled for a few moments about the writing-table, then went from the room.

Alice was unhappy. The reaction from her previous high spirits, as soon as it had fully come about, brought her even to tears. She cried silently, and, to do the girl justice, at least half her sorrow was on Emma’s account. Presently she rose and began to walk about the room; she went to the window, and looked out on to the white garden. The sky beyond the thin boughs was dusking; the wind, which sang so merrily a few hours ago, had fallen to sobbing.

It was too wretched to remain alone; she resolved to go into the drawing-room; perhaps

her brother was there. As she approached the door somebody knocked on the outside, then there entered a dark man of spruce appearance, who drew back a step as soon as he saw her.

‘Pray excuse me,’ he said, with an air of politeness. ‘I supposed I should find Mr. Mutimer here.’

‘I think he’s in the house,’ Alice replied.

Richard appeared as they were speaking.

‘What is it, Rodman?’ he asked abruptly, passing into the library.

‘I’ll go to the drawing-room,’ Alice said, and left the men together.

In half an hour Richard again joined her. He seemed in a better frame of mind, for he came in humming. Alice, having glanced at him, averted her face again and kept silence. She felt a hand smoothing her hair. Her brother, leaning over the back of her seat, whispered to her,—

‘You’ll help me, Princess?’

She did not answer.

‘You won’t be hard, Alice? It’s a wretched business, and I don’t know what I shall do if you throw me over. I can’t do without you, old girl.’

‘I can’t tell mother, Dick. You know very well what it’ll be. I daren’t do that.’

But even that task Alice at last took upon herself, after another half-hour’s discussion.

Alas! she would never again feel towards her brother as before this necessity fell upon her. Her life had undergone that impoverishment which is so dangerous to elementary natures, the loss of an ideal.

‘You’ll let me stay over to-morrow?’ she said. ‘There’s nothing very pleasant to go back to, and I don’t see that a day’ll matter.’

‘You can stay if you wish. I’m going to take you to have tea with Adela now. If you stay we’ll have her to dinner to-morrow.’

‘I wonder whether we shall get along?’ Alice mused.

‘I don’t see why not. You’ll get lots of things from her, little notions of all kinds.’

This is always a more or less dangerous form of recommendation, even in talking to one’s sister. To suggest that Adela would benefit by the acquaintance would have been a far more politic procedure.

‘What’s wrong with me?’ Alice inquired, still depressed by the scene she had gone through.

‘Oh, there’s nothing wrong. It’s only that you’ll see differences at first; from the people you’ve been used to, I mean. But I think you’ll have to go and get your things on; it’s nearly five.’

In Alice’s rising from her chair there was nothing of the elasticity that had marked her

before luncheon. Before moving away she spoke a thought that was troubling her.

‘Suppose mother tries to stop it?’

Richard looked to the ground moodily.

‘I meant to tell you,’ he said. ‘You’d better say that I’m already married.’

‘You’re giving me a nice job,’ was the girl’s murmured rejoinder.

‘Well, it’s as good as true. And it doesn’t make the job any worse.’

As is wont to be the case when two persons come to mutual understanding on a piece of baseness, the tone of brother and sister had suffered in the course of their dialogue. At first meeting they had both kept a certain watch upon their lips, feeling that their position demanded it; a moral limpness was evident in them by this time.

They set forth to walk to the Walthams’. Exercise in the keen air, together with the sense of novelty in her surroundings, restored Alice’s good humour before the house was reached. She gazed with astonishment at the infernal glare over New Wanley. Her brother explained the sight to her with gusto.

‘It used to be all fields and gardens over there,’ he said. ‘See what money and energy can do! You shall go over the works in the morning. Perhaps Adela will go with us, then we can take her back to the Manor.’

‘Why do they call the house that, Dick?’ Alice inquired. ‘Is it because people who live there are supposed to have good manners?’

‘May be, for anything I know,’ was the capitalist’s reply. ‘Only it’s spelt different, you know. I say, Alice, you must be careful about your spelling; there were mistakes in your last letter. Won’t do, you know, to make mistakes if you write to Adela.’

Alice gave a little shrug of impatience. Immediately after, they stopped at the threshold sacred to all genteel accomplishments—so Alice would have phrased it if she could have fully expressed her feeling—and they speedily entered the sitting-room, where the table was already laid for tea. Mrs. Waltham and her daughter rose to welcome them.

‘We knew of your arrival,’ said the former, bestowing on Alice a maternal salute. ‘Not many things happen in Wanley that all the village doesn’t hear of, do they, Mr. Mutimer? Of course we expected you to tea.’

Adela and her future sister-in-law kissed each other. Adela was silent, but she smiled.

‘You’ll take your things off, my dear?’ Mrs. Waltham continued. ‘Will you go upstairs with Miss Mutimer, Adela?’

But for Mrs. Waltham’s persistent geniality the hour which followed would have shown many lapses of conversation. Alice appreciated

at once those 'differences' at which her brother had hinted, and her present frame of mind was not quite consistent with patient humility. Naturally, she suffered much from self-consciousness ; Mrs. Waltham annoyed her by too frequent observation, Adela by seeming indifference. The delicacy of the latter was made perhaps a little excessive by strain of feelings. Alice at once came to the conclusion that Dick's future wife was cold and supercilious. She was not predisposed to like Adela. The circumstances were in a number of ways unfavourable. Even had there not existed the very natural resentment at the painful task which this young lady had indirectly imposed upon her, it was not in Alice's blood and breeding to take kindly at once to a girl of a class above her own. Alice had warm affections ; as a lady's-maid she might very conceivably have attached herself with much devotion to an indulgent mistress, but in the present case too much was asked of her. Richard was proud of his sister ; he saw her at length seated where he had so often imagined her, and in his eyes she bore herself well. He glanced often at Adela, hoping for a return glance of congratulation ; when it failed to come, he consoled himself with the reflection that such silent interchange of sentiments at table would be ill manners. In his very heart

he believed that of the two maidens his sister was the better featured. Adela and Alice sat over against each other; their contrasted appearances were a chapter of social history. Mark the difference between Adela's gently closed lips, every muscle under control; and Alice's, which could never quite close without forming a saucy pout or a self-conscious primness. Contrast the foreheads; on the one hand that tenderly shadowed curve of brow, on the other the surface which always seemed to catch too much of the light, which moved irregularly with the arches above the eyes. The grave modesty of the one face, the now petulant, now abashed, now vacant expression of the other. Richard in his heart preferred the type he had so long been familiar with; a state of feeling of course in no way inconsistent with the emotions excited in him by continual observation of Adela.

The two returned to the Manor at half-past seven, Alice rising with evident relief when he gave the signal. It was agreed that the latter part of the next morning should be spent in going over the works. Adela was very willing to be of the party.

'They haven't much money, have they?' was Alice's first question as soon as she got away from the door.

‘No, they are not rich,’ replied her brother.
‘You got on very nicely, old girl.’

‘Why shouldn’t I? You talk as if I didn’t know how to behave myself, Dick.’

‘No, I don’t. I say that you did behave yourself.’

‘Yes, and you were surprised at it.’

‘I wasn’t at all. What do you think of her?’

‘She doesn’t say much.’

‘No, she’s always very quiet. It’s her way.’

‘Yes.’

The monosyllable meant more than Richard gathered from it. They walked on in silence, and were met presently by a gentleman who was coming along the village street at a sharp pace. A lamp discovered Mr. Willis Rodman. Richard stopped.

‘Seen to that little business?’ he asked, in a cheerful voice.

‘Yes,’ was Rodman’s reply. ‘We shall hear from Agworth in the morning.’

‘All right.—Alice, this is Mr. Rodman.—My sister, Rodman.’

Richard’s right-hand man performed civilities with decidedly more finish than Richard himself had at command.

‘I am very happy to meet Miss Mutimer. I hope we shall have the pleasure of showing her New Wanley to-morrow.’

‘She and Miss Waltham will walk down in the morning. Good night, Rodman. Cold; eh?’

‘Why didn’t you introduce him this afternoon?’ Alice asked as she walked on.

‘I didn’t think of it—I was bothered.’

‘He seems very gentlemanly.’

‘Oh, Rodman’s seen a deal of life. He’s a useful fellow—gets through work in a wonderful way.’

‘But *is* he a gentleman? I mean, was he once?’

Richard laughed.

‘I suppose you mean, had he ever money? No, he’s made himself what he is.’

Tea having supplied the place of the more substantial evening meal, Richard and his sister had supper about ten o’clock. Alice drank champagne; a few bottles remained from those dedicated to the recent festival, and Mutimer felt the necessity of explaining the presence in his house of a luxury which to his class is more than anything associated with the bloated aristocracy. Alice drank it for the first time in her life, and her spirits grew as light as the foam upon her glass. Brother and sister were quietly confidential as midnight drew near.

‘Shall you bring her to London?’ Alice inquired, without previous mention of Adela.

‘For a week, I think. We shall go to an

hotel, of course. She's never seen London since she was a child.'

'She won't come to Highbury?'

'No. I shall avoid that somehow. You'll have to come and see us at the hotel. We'll go to the theatre together one night.'

'What about 'Arry?'

'I don't know. I shall think about it.'

Digesting much at his ease, Richard naturally became dreamful.

'I may have to take a house for a time now and then,' he said.

'In London?'

He nodded.

'I mustn't forget you, you see, Princess. Of course you'll come here sometimes, but that's not much good. In London I dare say I can get you to know some of the right kind of people. I want Adela to be thick with the Westlakes; then your chance'll come. See, old woman?'

Alice, too, dreamed.

'I wonder you don't want me to marry a Socialist working man,' she said presently, as if twitting him playfully.

'You don't understand. One of the things we aim at is to remove the distinction between classes. I want you to marry one of those they call gentlemen. And you shall too, Alice!'

‘Well, but I’m not a working girl now, Dick.’

He laughed, and said it was time to go to bed.

The same evening conversation continued to a late hour between Hubert Eldon and his mother. Hubert was returning to London the next morning.

Yesterday there had come to him two letters from Wanley, both addressed in female hand. He knew Adela’s writing from her signature in the ‘Christian Year,’ and hastily opened the letter which came from her. The sight of the returned sonnets checked the eager flow of his blood; he was prepared for what he afterwards read.

‘Then let her meet her fate,’—so ran his thoughts when he had perused the cold note, unassociable with the Adela he imagined in its bald formality. ‘Only life can teach her.’

The other letter he suspected to be from Letty Tew, as it was.

‘DEAR MR. ELDON,—I cannot help writing a line to you, lest you should think that I did not keep my promise in the way you understood it. I did indeed. You will hear from her; she preferred to write herself, and perhaps it was better; I should only have had painful

things to say. I wish to ask you to have no unkind or unjust thoughts; I scarcely think you could have. Please do not trouble to answer this, but believe me, yours sincerely,

‘L. TEW.’

‘Good little girl!’ he said to himself, smiling sadly. ‘I feel sure she did her best.’

But his pride was asserting itself, always restive under provocation. To rival with a man like Mutimer! Better that the severance with old days should be complete.

He talked it all over very frankly with his mother, who felt that her son’s destiny was not easily foreseen.

‘And what do you propose to do, Hubert?’ she asked, when they spoke of the future.

‘To study, principally art. In a fortnight I go to Rome.’

Mrs. Eldon had gone thither thirty years ago.

‘Think of me in my chair sometimes,’ she said, touching his hands with her wan fingers.

CHAPTER IV.

ALICE reached home again on Christmas Eve. It was snowing; she came in chilled and looking miserable. Mrs. Mutimer met her in the hall, passed her, and looked out at the open door, then turned with a few white flecks on her gown.

‘Where’s Dick?’

‘He couldn’t come,’ replied the girl briefly, and ran up to her room.

‘Arry was spending the evening with friends. Since tea-time the old woman had never ceased moving from room to room, up and down stairs. She had got out an old pair of Richard’s slippers, and had put them before the dining-room fire to warm. She had made a bed for Richard, and had a fire burning in the chamber. She had made arrangements for her eldest son’s supper. No word had come from Wanley, but she held to the conviction that this night would see Richard in London.

Alice came down and declared that she

was very hungry. Her mother went to the kitchen to order a meal, which in the end she prepared with her own hands. She seemed to have a difficulty in addressing any one. Whilst Alice ate in silence, Mrs. Mutimer kept going in and out of the room ; when the girl rose from the table, she stood before her and asked :

‘ Why couldn’t he come ? ’

Alice went to the fireplace, knelt down, and spread her hands to the blaze. Her mother approached her again.

‘ Won’t you give me no answer, Alice ? ’

‘ He couldn’t come, mother. Something important is keeping him.’

‘ Something important ? And why did he want you there ? ’

Alice rose to her feet, made one false beginning, then spoke to the point.

‘ Dick’s married, mother.’

The old woman’s eyes seemed to grow small in her wrinkled face, as if directing themselves with effort upon something minute. They looked straight into the eyes of her daughter, but had a more distant focus. The fixed gaze continued for nearly a minute.

‘ What are you talking about, girl ? ’ she said at length, in a strange, rattling voice. ‘ Why, I’ve seen Emma this very morning. Do you think she wouldn’t ’a told me if she’d been a wife ? ’

Alice was frightened by the look and the voice.

‘Mother, it isn’t Emma at all. It’s some one at Wanley. We can’t help it, mother. It’s no use taking on. Now sit down and make yourself quiet. It isn’t our fault.’

Mrs. Mutimer smiled in a grim way, then laughed—a most unmusical laugh.

‘Now what’s the good o’ joking in that kind o’ way? That’s like your father, that is; he’d often come ’ome an’ tell me sich things as never was, an’ expect me to believe ’em. An’ I used to purtend I did, jist to please him. But I’m too old for that kind o’ jokin’.—Alice, where’s Dick? How long ’ll it be before he’s here? Where did he leave you?’

‘Now do just sit down, mother; here, in this chair. Just sit quiet for a little, do.’

Mrs. Mutimer pushed aside the girl’s hand; her face had become grave again.

‘Let me be, child. And I tell you I have seen Emma to-day. Do you think she wouldn’t ’a told me if things o’ that kind was goin’ on?’

‘Emma knows nothing about it, mother. He hasn’t told any one. He got me to come because he couldn’t tell it himself. It was as much a surprise to me as to you, and I think it’s very cruel of him. But it’s over, and we can’t help it. I shall have to tell Emma, I suppose, and a nice thing too!’

The old woman had begun to quiver; her hands shook by her sides, her very features trembled with gathering indignation.

‘Dick has gone an’ done this?’ she stammered. ‘He’s gone an’ broke his given word? He’s deceived that girl as trusted to him an’ couldn’t help herself?’

‘Now, mother, don’t take on so! You’re going to make yourself ill. It can’t be helped. He says he shall send Emma money just the same.’

‘Money! There you’ve hit the word; it’s money as ’as ruined him, and as’ll be the ruin of us all. Send her money! What does the man think she’s made of? Is all his feelings got as hard as money? and does he think the same of every one else? If I know Emma, she’ll throw his money in his face. I knew what ’ud come of it, don’t tell me I didn’t. That very night as he come ’ome an’ told me what had ’appened, there was a cold shiver run over me. I told him as it was the worst news ever come into our ’ouse, and now see if I wasn’t right! He was angry with me ’cause I said it, an’ who’s a right to be angry now? It’s my belief as money’s the curse o’ this world; I never knew a trouble yet as didn’t somehow come of it, either ’cause there was too little or else too much. And Dick’s gone an’ done this? And

him with all his preachin' about rights and wrongs an' what not! Him as was always a-cryin' down the rich folks 'cause they hadn't no feelin' for the poor! What feeling's *he* had, I'd like to know? It's him as is rich now, an' where's the difference 'tween him and them as he called names? No feelin' for the poor! An' what's Emma Vine? Poor enough by now. There's Jane as can't have not a week more to live, an' she a-nursin' her night an' day. He'll give her money!—has he got the face to say it? Nay, don't talk to me, girl; I'll say what I think, if it's the last I speak in this world. Don't let him come to me! Never a word again shall he have from me as long as I live. He's disgraced himself, an' me his mother, an' his father in the grave. A poor girl as couldn't help herself, as trusted him an' wouldn't hear not a word against him, for all he kep' away from her in her trouble. I'd a fear o' this, but I wouldn't believe it of Dick; I wouldn't believe it of a son o' mine. An' 'Arry'll go the same way. It's all the money, an' a curse go with all the money as ever was made! An' you too, Alice, wi' your fine dresses, an' your piannerin', an' your falde-dals. But I warn you, my girl. There'll no good come of it. I warn you, Alice! You're ashamed o' your own mother—oh, I've seen it! But it's a mercy if you're not a disgrace to

her. I'm thankful as I was always poor; I might 'a been tempted i' the same way.'

The dogma of a rude nature full of secret forces found utterance at length under the scourge of a resentment of very mingled quality. Let half be put to the various forms of disinterested feeling, at least half was due to personal exasperation. The whole change that her life had perforce undergone was an outrage upon the stubbornness of uninstructed habit; the old woman could see nothing but evil omens in a revolution which cost her bodily discomfort and the misery of a mind perplexed amid alien conditions. She was prepared for evil; for months she had brooded over every sign which seemed to foretell its approach; the egoism of the unconscious had made it plain to her that the world must suffer in a state of things which so grievously affected herself. Maternal solicitude kept her restlessly swaying between apprehension for her children and injury in the thought of their estrangement from her. And now at length a bitter shame added itself to her torments. She was shamed in her pride as a mother, shamed before the girl for whom she nourished a deep affection. Emma's injuries she felt charged upon herself; she would never dare to stand before her again. Her moral code, as much a part of her as the sap of the plant and as little the result of con-

scious absorption, declared itself on the side of all these rushing impulses; she was borne blindly on an exhaustless flux of words. After vain attempts to make herself heard, Alice turned away and sat sullenly waiting for the outburst to spend itself. Herself comparatively unaffected by the feelings strongest in her mother, this ear-afflicting clamour altogether checked her sympathy, and in a great measure overcame those personal reasons which had made her annoyed with Richard. She found herself taking his side, even knew something of his impatience with Emma and her sorrows. When it came to rebukes and charges against herself her impatience grew active. She stood up again and endeavoured to make herself heard.

‘What’s the good of going on like this, mother? Just because you’re angry, that’s no reason you should call us all the names you can turn your tongue to. It’s over and done with, and there’s an end of it. I don’t know what you mean about disgracing you; I think you might wait till the time comes. I don’t see what I’ve done as you can complain of.’

‘No, of course you don’t,’ pursued her mother bitterly. ‘It’s the money as prevents you from seeing it. Them as was good enough for you before you haven’t a word to say to now; a man as works honestly for his living

you make no account of. Well, well, you must go your own way——’

‘What is it you want, mother? You don’t expect me to look no higher than when I hadn’t a penny but what I worked for? I’ve no patience with you. You ought to be glad——’

‘You haven’t no patience, of course you haven’t. And I’m to be glad when a son of mine does things as he deserves to be sent to prison for! I don’t understand that kind o’ gladness. But mind what I say; do what you like with your money, I’ll have no more part in it. If I had as much as ten shillings a week of my own, I’d go and live by myself, and leave you to take your own way. But I tell you what I *can* do, and what I will. I’ll have no more servants a-waitin’ on *me*; I wasn’t never used to it, and I’m too old to begin. I go to my own bedroom upstairs, and there I live, and there’ll be nobody go into that room but myself. I’ll get my bits o’ meals from the kitchen. ’Tain’t much as I want, thank goodness, an’ it won’t be missed. I’ll have no more doin’s with servants, understand that; an’ if I can’t be left alone i’ my own room, I’ll go an’ find a room where I can, an’ I’ll find some way of earnin’ what little I want. It’s your own house, and you’ll do what you like in it. There’s the keys, I’ve done with ’em; an’ here’s the money too, I’m glad to be rid of it. An’

you'll just tell Dick. I ain't one as says what I don't mean, nor never was, as that you know. You take your way, an' I'll take mine. An' now may be I'll get a night's sleep, the first I've had under this roof.'

As she spoke she took from her pockets the house keys, and from her purse the money she used for current expenses, and threw all together on to the table. Alice had turned to the fire-place, and she stood so for a long time after her mother had left the room. Then she took the keys and the money, consulted her watch, and in a few minutes was walking from the house to a neighbouring cab-stand.

She drove to Wilton Square. Inspecting the front of the house before knocking at the door, she saw a light in the kitchen and a dimmer gleam at an upper window. It was Mrs. Clay who opened to her.

'Is Emma in?' Alice inquired as she shook hands rather coldly.

'She's sitting with Jane. I'll tell her. There's no fire except in the kitchen,' Kate added, in a tone which implied that doubtless her visitor was above taking a seat downstairs.

'I'll go down,' Alice replied, with just a touch of condescension. 'I want to speak a word or two with Emma, that's all.'

Kate left her to descend the stairs, and went to inform her sister. Emma was not long

in appearing ; the hue of her face was troubled, for she had deceived herself with the belief that it was Richard who knocked at the door. What more natural than for him to have come on Christmas Eve ? She approached Alice with a wistful look, not venturing to utter any question, only hoping that some good news might have been brought her. Long watching in the sick room had given her own complexion the tint of ill-health ; her eyelids were swollen and heavy ; the brown hair upon her temples seemed to droop in languor. You would have noticed that her tread was very soft, as if she still were moving in the room above.

‘How’s Jane?’ Alice began by asking. She could not quite look the other in the face, and did not know how to begin her disclosure.

‘No better,’ Emma gave answer, shaking her head. Her voice, too, was suppressed ; it was weeks since she had spoken otherwise.

‘I am so sorry, Emma. Are you in a hurry to go up again?’

‘No. Kate will sit there a little.’

‘You look very poorly yourself. It must be very trying for you.’

‘I don’t feel it,’ Emma said, with a pale smile. ‘She gives no trouble. It’s only her weakness now ; the pain has almost gone.’

‘But then she must be getting better.’

Emma shook her head, looking aside. As Alice kept silence, she continued :

‘I was glad to hear you’d gone to see Richard. He wouldn’t—I was afraid he mightn’t have time to get here for Christmas.’

There was a question in the words, a timorously expectant question. Emma had learnt the sad lesson of hope deferred, always to meet discouragement halfway. It is thus one seeks to propitiate the evil powers, to turn the edge of their blows by meekness.

‘No, he couldn’t come,’ said Alice.

She had a muff on her left hand, and was turning it round and round with the other. Emma had not asked her to sit down, merely because of the inward agitation which absorbed her.

‘He’s quite well?’

‘Oh yes, quite well.’

Again Alice paused. Emma’s heart was beating painfully. She knew now that Richard’s sister had not come on an ordinary visit; she felt that the call to Wanley had had some special significance. Alice did not ordinarily behave in this hesitating way.

‘Did—did he send me a message?’

‘Yes.’

But even now Alice could not speak. She found a way of leading up to the catastrophe.

‘Oh, mother has been going on so, Emma !

What do you think? She won't have anything to do with the house any longer. She's given me the keys and all the money she had, and she's going to live just in her bedroom. She says she'll get her food from the kitchen herself, and she won't have a thing done for her by any one. I'm sure she means it; I never saw her in such a state. She says if she'd ever so little money of her own, she'd leave the house altogether. She's been telling me I've no feeling, and that I'm going to the bad, that I shall live to disgrace her, and I can't tell you what. Everything is so miserable! She says it's all the money, and that she knew from the first how it would be. And I'm afraid some of what she says is true, I am indeed, Emma. But things happen in a way you could never think. I half wish myself the money had never come. It's making us all miserable.'

Emma listened, expecting from phrase to phrase some word which would be to her a terrible enlightenment. But Alice had ceased, and the word still unspoken.

'You say he sent me a message?'

She did not ask directly the cause of Mrs. Mutimer's anger. Instinct told her that to hear the message would explain all else.

'Emma, I'm afraid to tell you. You'll blame *me*, like mother did.'

‘I shan’t blame you, Alice. Will you please tell me the message?’

Emma’s lips seemed to speak without her volition. The rest of her face was fixed and cold.

‘He’s married, Emma.’

‘He asked you to tell me?’

Alice was surprised at the self-restraint proved by so quiet an interrogation.

‘Yes, he did. Emma, I’m so, so sorry! If only you’ll believe I’m sorry, Emma! He *made* me come and tell you. He said if I didn’t you’d have to find out by chance, because he couldn’t for shame tell you himself. And he couldn’t tell mother neither. I’ve had it all to do. If you knew what I’ve gone through with mother! It’s very hard that other people should suffer so much just on his account. I am really sorry for you, Emma.’

‘Who is it he’s married?’ Emma asked. Probably all the last speech had been but a vague murmur to her ears.

‘Some one at Wanley.’

‘A lady?’

‘Yes, I suppose she’s a lady.’

‘You didn’t see her, then?’

‘Yes, I saw her. I don’t like her.’

Poor Alice meant this to be soothing. Emma knew it, and smiled.

‘I don’t think she cares much after all,’ Alice said to herself.

‘But was that the message?’

‘Only to tell you of it, Emma. There was something else,’ she added immediately; ‘not exactly a message, but he told me, and I dare say he thought I should let you know. He said that of course you were to have the money still as usual.’

Over the listener’s face came a cloud, a deep, turbid red. It was not anger, but shame which rose from the depths of her being. Her head sank; she turned and walked aside.

‘You’re not angry with *me*, Emma?’

‘Not angry at all, Alice,’ was the reply in a monotone.

‘I must say good-bye now. I hope you won’t take on much. And I hope Jane’ll soon be better.’

‘Thank you. I must go up to her; she doesn’t like me to be away long.’

Alice went before up the kitchen stairs, the dark, narrow stairs which now seemed to her so poverty-stricken. Emma did not speak, but pressed her hand at the door.

Kate stood above her on the first landing, and, as Emma came up, whispered:

‘Has he come?’

‘Something has hindered him.’ And Emma added, ‘He couldn’t help it.’

‘Well, then, I think he ought to have helped

it,' said the other tartly. 'When does he mean to come, I'd like to know?'

'It's uncertain.'

'Emma passed into the sick-room. Her sister followed her with eyes of ill-content, then returned to the kitchen.

Jane lay against pillows. Red light from the fire played over her face, which was wasted beyond recognition. She looked a handmaiden of Death.

The atmosphere of the room was warm and sickly. A small green-shaded lamp stood by the looking-glass in front of the window; it cast a disk of light below, and on the ceiling concentric rings of light and shade, which flickered ceaselessly, and were at times all but obliterated in a gleam from the fireplace. A kettle sang on the trivet.

The sick girl's hands lay on the counterpane; one of them moved as Emma came to the bedside, and rested when the warmer fingers clasped it. There was eager inquiry in the sunken eyes; her hand tried to raise itself, but in vain.

'What did Alice say?' she asked, in quick feeble tones. 'Is he coming?'

'Not for Christmas, I'm afraid, dear. He's still very busy.'

'But he sent you a message?'

'Yes. He would have come if he could.'

‘Did you tell Alice I wanted to see her? Why didn’t she come up? Why did she stay such a short time?’

‘She couldn’t stay to-night, Jane. Are you easy still, love?’

‘Oh, I did so want to see her! Why couldn’t she stop, Emma? It wasn’t kind of her to go without seeing me. I’d have made time if it had been her as was lying in bed. And he doesn’t even answer what I wrote to him. It was such work to write—I couldn’t now; and he might have answered.’

‘He very seldom writes to any one, you know, Jane. He has so little time.’

‘Little time! I have less, Emma, and he must know that. It’s unkind of him. What did Alice tell you? Why did he want her to go there? Tell me everything.’

Emma felt the sunken eyes burning her with their eager look. She hesitated, pretended to think of something that had to be done, and the eyes burned more and more. Jane made repeated efforts to raise herself, as if to get a fuller view of her sister’s face.

‘Shall I move you?’ Emma asked. ‘Would you like another pillow?’

‘No, no,’ was the impatient answer. ‘Don’t go away from me; don’t take your hand away. I want to know all that Alice said. You haven’t any secrets from me, Emmy. Why

does he stay away so long? It seems years since he came to see you. It's wrong of him. There's no business ought to keep him away all this time. Look at me, and tell me what she said.'

'Only that he hadn't time. Dear, you mustn't excite yourself so. Isn't it all right, Jane, as long as I don't mind it?'

'Why do you look away from me? No, it isn't all right. Oh, I can't rest, I can't lie here! Why haven't I strength to go and say to him what I want to say? I thought it was him when the knock came. When Kate told me it wasn't, I felt as if my heart was sinking down; and I don't seem to have no tears left to cry. It 'ud ease me a little if I could. And now *you're* beginning to have secrets. Emmy!'

It was a cry of anguish. The mention of tears had brought them to Emma's eyes, for they lurked very near the surface, and Jane had seen the firelight touch on a moist cheek. For an instant she raised herself from the pillows. Emma folded soft arms about her and pressed her cheek against the heat which consumed her sister's.

'Emmy, I must know,' wailed the sick girl. 'Is it what I've been afraid of? No, not that! Is it the worst of all? You *must* tell me now. You don't love me if you keep away the truth. I can't have anything between you and me.'

A dry sob choked her; she gasped for breath. Emma, fearful lest the very life was escaping from her embrace, drew away and looked in anguish. Her involuntary tears had ceased, but she could no longer practise deception. The cost to Jane was greater perhaps than if she knew the truth. At least their souls must be united ere it was too late.

‘The truth, Emmy!’

‘I will tell it you, darling,’ she replied, with quiet sadness. ‘It’s for him that I’m sorry. I never thought anything could tempt him to break his word. Think of it in the same way as I do, dear sister; don’t be sorry for me, but for him.’

‘He’s never coming? He won’t marry you?’

‘He’s already married, Jane. Alice came to tell me.’

Again she would have raised herself, but this time there was no strength. Not even her arms could she lift from the coverlets. But Emma saw the vain effort, raised the thin arms, put them about her neck, and held her sister to her heart as if for eternity.

‘Darling, darling, it isn’t hard to bear. I care for nothing but your love. Live for my sake, dearest dear; I have forgotten every one and everything but you. It’s so much better. I couldn’t have changed my life so; I was

never meant to be rich. It seems unkind of him, but in a little time we shall see it was best. Only you, Janey ; you have my whole heart, and I'm so glad to feel it is so. Live, and I'll give every minute of my life to loving you, poor sufferer.'

Jane could not breathe sound into the words she would have spoken. She lay with her eyes watching the fire-play on the ceiling. Her respiration was quick and feeble.

Mutimer's name was not mentioned by either again that night, by one of them never again. Such silence was his punishment.

Kate entered the room a little before midnight. She saw one of Jane's hands raised to impose silence. Emma, still sitting by the bedside, slept ; her head rested on the pillows. The sick had become the watcher.

'She'd better go to bed,' Kate whispered. 'I'll wake her.'

'No, no ! You needn't stay, Kate. I don't want anything. Let her sleep as she is.'

The elder sister left the room. Then Jane approached her head to that of the sleeper, softly, softly, and her arm stole across Emma's bosom and rested on her farther shoulder. The fire burned with little whispering tongues of flame ; the circles of light and shade quivered above the lamp. Abroad the snow fell and froze upon the ground.

Three days later Alice Mutimer, as she sat at breakfast, was told that a visitor named Mrs. Clay desired to see her. It was nearly ten o'clock; Alice had no passion for early rising, and since her mother's retirement from the common table she breakfasted alone at any hour which seemed good to her. 'Arry always—or nearly always—left the house at eight o'clock.

Mrs. Clay was introduced into the dining-room. Alice received her with an anxious face, for she was anticipating trouble from the house in Wilton Square. But the trouble was other than she had in mind.

'Jane died at four o'clock this morning,' the visitor began, without agitation, in the quick, unsympathetic voice which she always used when her equanimity was in any way disturbed. 'Emma hasn't closed her eyes for two days and nights, and now I shouldn't wonder if she's going to be ill herself. I made her lie down, and then came out just to ask you to write to your brother. Surely he'll come now. I don't know what to do about the burying; we ought to have some one to help us. I expected your mother would be coming to see us, but she's kept away all at once. Will you write to Dick?'

Alice was concerned to perceive that Kate was still unenlightened.

‘Did Emma know you were coming?’ she asked.

‘Yes, I suppose she did. But it’s hard to get her to attend to anything. I’ve left her alone, ’cause there wasn’t any one I could fetch at once. Will you write to-day?’

‘Yes, I’ll see to it,’ said Alice. ‘Have some breakfast, will you?’

‘Well, I don’t mind just a cup o’ coffee. It’s very cold, and I had to walk a long way before I could get a ’bus.’

Whilst Kate refreshed herself, Alice played nervously with her tea-spoon, trying to make up her mind what must be done. The situation was complicated with many miseries, but Alice had experienced a growth of independence since her return from Wanley. All she had seen and heard whilst with her brother had an effect upon her in the afterthought, and her mother’s abrupt surrender into her hands of the household control gave her, when she had time to realise it, a sense of increased importance not at all disagreeable. Already she had hired a capable servant in addition to the scrubby maid-of-all-work who had sufficed for Mrs. Mutimer, and it was her intention that henceforth domestic arrangements should be established on quite another basis.

‘I’ll telegraph to Dick,’ she said, presently. ‘I’ve no doubt he’ll see that everything’s done properly.’

‘But won’t he come himself?’

‘We shall see.’

‘Is your mother in?’

‘She’s not very well; I don’t think I must disturb her with bad news. Tell Emma I’m very sorry, will you? I do hope she isn’t going to be ill. You must see that she gets rest now. Was it sudden?’ she added, showing in her face how little disposed she was to dwell on such gloomy subjects as death and burial.

‘She was wandering all yesterday. I don’t think she knew anything after eight o’clock last night. She went off in a sleep.’

When the visitor had gone, Alice drove to the nearest telegraph office and despatched a message to her brother, giving the news and asking what should be done. By three o’clock in the afternoon no reply had yet arrived; but shortly after Mr. Keene presented himself at the house. Alice had not seen him since her return. He bowed to her with extreme gravity, and spoke in a subdued voice.

‘I grieve that I have lost time, Miss Mutimer. Important business had taken me from home, and on my return I found a telegram from Wanley. Your brother directs me to wait upon you at once, on a very sad subject, I fear. He instructs me to purchase a grave in Manor Park Cemetery. No near relative, I trust?’

‘No, only a friend,’ Alice replied. ‘You’ve

heard me speak of a girl called Emma Vine. It's a sister of hers. She died this morning, and they want help about the funeral.'

'Precisely, precisely. You know with what zeal I hasten to perform your'—a slight emphasis on this word—'brother's pleasure, be the business what it may. I'll see about it at once. I was to say to you that your brother would be in town this evening.'

'Oh, very well. But you needn't look so gloomy, you know, Mr. Keene. I'm very sorry, but then she's been ill for a very long time, and it's really almost a relief—to her sisters, I mean.'

'I trust you enjoyed your visit to Wanley, Miss Mutimer?' said Keene, still preserving his very respectful tone and bearing.

'Oh yes, thanks. I dare say I shall go there again before very long. No doubt you'll be glad to hear that.'

'I will try to be, Miss Mutimer. I trust that your pleasure is my first consideration in life.'

Alice was, to speak vulgarly, practising on Mr. Keene. He was her first visitor since she had entered upon rule, and she had a double satisfaction in subduing him with airs and graces. She did not trouble to reflect that under the circumstances he might think her rather heartless, and indeed hypocrisy was not one of her failings. Her *naïveté* constituted

such charm as she possessed ; in the absence of any deep qualities it might be deemed a virtue, for it was inconsistent with serious deception.

‘I suppose you mean you’d really much rather I stayed here?’

Keene eyed her with observation. He himself had slight depth for a man doomed to live by his wits, and he was under the disadvantage of really feeling something of what he said. He was not a rascal by predilection ; merely driven that way by the forces which in our social state abundantly make for rascality.

‘Miss Mutimer,’ he replied, with a stage sigh, ‘why do you tempt my weakness? I am on my honour ; I am endeavouring to earn your good opinion. Spare me!’

‘Oh, I’m sure there’s no harm in you, Mr. Keene. I suppose you’d better go and see after your—your business.’

‘You are right. I go at once, Princess. I may call you Princess?’

‘Well, I don’t know about that. Of course only when there’s no one else in the room.’

‘But I shall think it always.’

‘That I can’t prevent, you know.’

‘Ah, I fear you mean nothing, Miss Mutimer.’

‘Nothing at all.’

He took his leave, and Alice enjoyed re-

flecting upon the dialogue, which certainly had meant nothing for her in any graver sense.

‘Now that’s what the books call *flirtation*,’ she said to herself. ‘I think I can do that.’

And on the whole she could, vastly better than might have been expected of her birth and breeding.

At six o’clock a note was delivered for her. Richard wrote from an hotel in the neighbourhood, asking her to come to him. She found him in a private sitting-room, taking a meal.

‘Why didn’t you come to the house?’ she asked. ‘You knew mother never comes downstairs.’

Richard looked at her with lowered brows.

‘You mean to say she’s doing that in earnest?’

‘That she is! She comes down early in the morning and gets all the food she wants for the day. I heard her cooking something in a frying-pan to-day. She hasn’t been out of the house yet.’

‘Does she know about Jane?’

‘No. I know what it would be if I went and told her.’

He ate in silence. Alice waited.

‘You must go and see Emma,’ was his next remark. ‘Tell her there’s a grave in Manor Park Cemetery; her father and mother were buried there, you know. Keene’ll look after

it all, and he'll come and tell you what to do.'

'Why did you come up?'

'Oh, I couldn't talk about these things in letters. You'll have to tell mother; she might want to go to the funeral.'

'I don't see why I should do all your disagreeable work, Dick!'

'Very well, don't do it,' he replied sullenly, throwing down his knife and fork.

A scene of wrangling followed, without violence, but of the kind which is at once a cause and an effect of demoralisation. The old disagreements between them had been in another tone, at all events on Richard's side, for they had arisen from his earnest disapproval of frivolities and the like. Richard could no longer speak in that way. To lose the power of honest reproof in consequence of a moral lapse is to any man a wide-reaching calamity; to a man of Mutimer's calibre it meant disaster of which the end could not be foreseen.

Of course Alice yielded; her affection and Richard's superior force always made it a foregone result that she should do so.

'And you won't come and see mother?' she asked.

'No. She's behaving foolishly.'

'It's precious dull at home, I can tell you. I can't go on much longer without friends of

some kind. I've a good mind to marry Mr. Keene, just for a change.'

Richard started up, with his fist on the table.

'Do you mean to say he's been talking to you in that way?' he cried angrily.

Alice had spoken with thoughtless petulance. She hastened eagerly to correct her error.

'As if I meant it! Don't be stupid, Dick. Of course he hasn't said a word; I believe he's engaged to somebody; I thought so from something he said a little while ago. The idea of me marrying a man like that!'

He examined her closely, and Alice was not afraid of tell-tale cheeks.

'Well, I can't think you'd be such a fool. If I thought there was any danger of that, I'd soon stop it.'

'Would you, indeed! Why, that would be just the way to make me say I'd have him. You'd have known that if only you read novels.'

'Novels!' he exclaimed, with profound contempt. 'Don't go playing with that kind of thing; it's dangerous. At least you can wait a week or two longer. I've only let him see so much of you because I felt sure you'd got common sense.'

'Of course I have. But what's to happen in a week or two?'

‘I should think you might come to Wanley for a little. We shall see. If mother had only ’Arry in the house, she might come back to her senses.’

‘Shall I tell her you’ve been to London?’

‘You can if you like,’ he replied, with a show of indifference.

Jane Vine was buried on Sunday afternoon, her sisters alone accompanying her to the grave. Alice had with difficulty obtained admission to her mother’s room, and it seemed to her that the news she brought was received with little emotion. The old woman had an air of dogged weariness; she did not look her daughter in the face, and spoke only in monosyllables. Her face was yellow, her cheeks like wrinkled parchment.

Manor Park Cemetery lies in the remote East End, and gives sleeping-places to the inhabitants of a vast district. There Jane’s parents lay, not in a grave to themselves, but buried amidst the nameless dead, in that part of the ground reserved for those who can purchase no more than a portion in the foss which is filled when its occupants reach statutable distance from the surface. The regions around were then being built upon for the first time; the familiar streets of pale, damp brick were stretching here and there, continuing

London, much like the spreading of a disease. Epping Forest is near at hand, and nearer the dreary expanse of Wanstead Flats.

Not grief, but chill desolation makes this cemetery its abode. A country churchyard touches the tenderest memories, and softens the heart with longing for the eternal rest. The cemeteries of wealthy London abound in dear and great associations, or at worst preach homilies which connect themselves with human dignity and pride. Here on the waste limits of that dread East, to wander among tombs is to go hand in hand with the stark and eyeless emblem of mortality; the spirit fails beneath the cold burden of ignoble destiny. Here lie those who were born for toil; who, when toil has worn them to the uttermost, have but to yield their useless breath and pass into oblivion. For them is no day, only the brief twilight of a winter sky between the former and the latter night. For them no aspiration; for them no hope of memory in the dust; their very children are wearied into forgetfulness. Indistinguishable units in the vast throng that labours but to support life, the name of each, father, mother, child, is as a dumb cry for the warmth and love of which Fate so stinted them. The wind wails above their narrow tenements; the sandy soil, soaking in the rain as soon as it has fallen, is a symbol of the great world which

absorbs their toil and straightway blots their being.

It being Sunday afternoon the number of funerals was considerable; even to bury their dead the toilers cannot lose a day of the wage week. Around the chapel was a great collection of black vehicles with sham-tailed mortuary horses; several of the families present must have left themselves bare in order to clothe a coffin in the way they deemed seemly. Emma and her sister had made their own funeral garments, and the former, in consenting for the sake of poor Jane to receive the aid which Mutimer offered, had insisted through Alice that there should be no expenditure beyond the strictly needful. The carriage which conveyed her and Kate alone followed the hearse from Hoxton; it rattled along at a merry pace, for the way was lengthy, and a bitter wind urged men and horses to speed. The occupants of the box kept up a jesting colloquy.

Impossible to read the burial service over each of the dead separately; time would not allow it. Emma and Kate found themselves crowded among a number of sobbing women, just in time to seat themselves before the service began. Neither of them had moist eyes; the elder looked about the chapel with blank gaze, often shivering with cold; Emma's face was bent downwards, deadly pale, set in unchanging

woe. A world had fallen to pieces about her ; she did not feel the ground upon which she trod ; there seemed no way from amid the ruins. She had no strong religious faith ; a wail in the darkness was all the expression her heart could attain to ; in the present anguish she could not turn her thoughts to that far vision of a life hereafter. All day she had striven to realise that a box of wood contained all that was left of her sister. The voice of the clergyman struck her ear with meaningless monotony. Not immortality did she ask for, but one more whisper from the lips that could not speak, one throb of the heart she had striven so despairingly to warm against her own.

Kate was plucking at her arm, for the service was over, and unconsciously she was impeding people who wished to pass from the seats. With difficulty she rose and walked ; the cold seemed to have checked the flow of her blood ; she noticed the breath rising from her mouth, and wondered that she could have so much whilst those dear lips were breathless. Then she was being led over hard snow, towards a place where men stood, where there was new-turned earth, where a coffin lay upon the ground. She suffered the sound of more words which she could not follow, then heard the dull falling of clods upon hollow wood. A hand seemed to clutch her throat, she struggled convulsively

and cried aloud. But the tears would not come.

No memory of the return home dwelt afterwards in her mind. The white earth, the headstones sprinkled with snow, the vast grey sky over which darkness was already creeping, the wind and the clergyman's voice joining in woful chant, these alone remained with her to mark the day. Between it and the days which then commenced lay formless void.

On Tuesday morning Alice Mutimer came to the house. Mrs. Clay chanced to be from home; Emma received the visitor and led her down into the kitchen.

'I am glad you have come,' she said; 'I wanted to see you to-day.'

'Are you feeling better?' Alice asked. She tried in vain to speak with the friendliness of past days; that could never be restored. Her advantages of person and dress were no help against the embarrassment caused in her by the simple dignity of the wronged and sorrowing girl.

Emma replied that she was better, then asked:

'Have you come only to see me, or for something else?'

'I wanted to know how you were; but I've brought you something as well.'

She took an envelope from within her muff. Emma shook her head.

‘No, nothing more,’ she said, in a tone removed alike from resentment and from pathos. ‘I want you, please, to say that we can’t take anything after this.’

‘But what are you going to do, Emma?’

‘To leave this house and live as we did before.’

‘Oh, but you can’t do that! What does Kate say?’

‘I haven’t told her yet; I’m going to do so to-day.’

‘But she’ll feel it very hard with the children.’

The children were sitting together in a corner of the kitchen. Emma glanced at them, and saw that Bertie, the elder, was listening with a surprised look.

‘Yes, I’m sorry,’ she replied simply, ‘but we have no choice.’

Alice had an impulse of generosity.

‘Then take it from *me*,’ she said. ‘You won’t mind that. You know I have plenty of my own. Live here and let one or two of the rooms, and I’ll lend you what you need till the business is doing well. Now you can’t have anything to say against that?’

Emma still shook her head.

‘The business will never help us. We must go back to the old work; we can always

live on that. I can't take anything from you, Alice.'

'Well, I think it's very unkind, Emma.'

'Perhaps so, but I can't help it. It's kind of you to offer, I feel that ; but I'd rather work my fingers to the bone than touch one half-penny now that I haven't earned.'

Alice bridled slightly and urged no more. She left before Kate returned.

In the course of the morning Emma strung herself to the effort of letting her sister know the true state of affairs. It was only what Kate had for a long time suspected, and she freely said as much, expressing her sentiments with fluent indignation.

'Of course I know you won't hear of it,' she said, 'but if I was in your place I'd make him smart. I'd have him up and make him pay, see if I wouldn't. Trust him, he knows you're too soft-hearted, and he takes advantage of you. It's girls like you as encourages men to think they can do as they like. You've no right, you haven't, to let him off. I'd have him in the newspapers and show him up, see if I wouldn't. And he shan't have it quite so easy as he thinks neither ; I'll go about and tell everybody as I know. Only let him come a-lecturin' hereabouts, that's all !'

'Kate,' broke in the other, 'if you do any-

thing of the kind, I don't know how I shall speak to you again. It's not you he's harmed; you've no right to spread talk about me. It's my affair, and I must do as I think fit. It's all over, and there's no occasion for neither you nor me to speak of him again. I'm going out this afternoon to find a room for us, and we shall be no worse off than we was before. We've got to work, that's all, and to earn our living like other women do.'

Her sister stared incredulously.

'You mean to say he's stopped sending money?'

'I have refused to take it.'

'You've done *what*? Well, of all the ——!'

Comparisons failed her. 'And I've got to take these children back again into a hole like the last? Not me! You do as you like; I suppose you know your own business. But if he doesn't send the money as usual, I'll find some way to make him, see if I don't! You're off your head, I think.'

Emma had anticipated this, and was prepared to bear the brunt of her sister's anger. Kate was not originally blessed with much sweetness of disposition, and an unhappy marriage had made her into a sour, nagging woman. But, in spite of her wretched temper and the low moral tone induced during her years of matrimony, she was not evil-natured, and her

chief safeguard was affection for her sister Emma. This seldom declared itself, for she was of those unhappily constituted people who find nothing so hard as to betray the tenderness of which they are capable, and, as often as not, are driven by a miserable perversity to words and actions which seem quite inconsistent with such feeling. For Jane she had cared far less than for Emma, yet her grief at Jane's death was more than could be gathered from her demeanour. It had, in fact, resulted in a state of nervous irritableness; an outbreak of anger came to her as a relief, such as Emma had recently found in the shedding of tears. On her own account she felt strongly, but yet more on Emma's; coarse methods of revenge naturally suggested themselves to her, and to be thwarted drove her to exasperation. When Emma persisted in steady opposition, exerting all the force of her character to subdue her sister's ignoble purposes, Kate worked herself to frenzy. For more than an hour her voice was audible in the street, as she poured forth torrents of furious reproach and menace; all the time Emma stood patient and undaunted, her own anger often making terrible struggle for mastery, but ever finding itself subdued. For she, too, was of a passionate nature, but the treasures of sensibility which her heart enclosed consecrated all her being to noble ends. One

invaluable aid she had in a contest such as this—her inability to grow sullen. Righteous anger might gleam in her eyes and quiver upon her lips, but the fire always burnt clear; it is smoulder that poisons the air.

She knew her sister, pitied her, always made for her the gentlest allowances. It would have been easy to stand aside, to disclaim responsibility, and let Kate do as she chose, but the easy course was never the one she chose when endurance promised better results. To resist to the uttermost, even to claim and exert the authority she derived from her suffering, was, she knew, the truest kindness to her sister. And in the end she prevailed. Kate tore her passion to tatters, then succumbed to exhaustion. But she did not fling out of the room, and this Emma knew to be a hopeful sign. The opportunity of strong, placid speech at length presented itself, and Emma used it well. She did not succeed in eliciting a promise, but when she declared her confidence in her sister's better self, Kate made no retort, only sat in stubborn muteness.

In the afternoon Emma went forth to fulfil her intention of finding lodgings. She avoided the neighbourhood in which she had formerly lived, and after long search discovered what she wanted in a woful byway near Old Street. It was one room only, but larger than she had

hoped to come upon ; fortunately her own furniture had been preserved, and would now suffice.

Kate remained sullen, but proved by her actions that she had surrendered ; she began to pack her possessions. Emma wrote to Alice, announcing that the house was tenantless ; she took the note to Highbury herself, and left it at the door, together with the house key. The removal was effected after nightfall.

CHAPTER V.

MOVEMENTS which appeal to the reason and virtue of humanity, and are consequently doomed to remain long in the speculative stage, prove their vitality by enduring the tests of schism. A Socialistic propaganda in times such as our own, an insistence upon the principles of Christianity in a modern Christian state, the advocacy of peace and good-will in an age when falsehood is the foundation of the social structure, and internecine warfare is presupposed in every compact between man and man, might anticipate that the test would come soon, and be of a stringent nature. Accordingly it did not surprise Mr. Westlake, when he discerned the beginnings of commotion in the Union of which he represented the cultured and leading elements. A comrade named Roodhouse had of late been coming into prominence by addressing himself in fiery eloquence to open-air meetings, and at length had taken upon himself to more than hint that the movement was at a standstill owing to the luke-

warmness (in guise of practical moderation) of those to whom its guidance had been entrusted. The reports of Comrade Roodhouse's lectures were of a nature that made it difficult for Mr. Westlake to print them in the *Fiery Cross*; one such report arrived at length, that of a meeting held on Clerkenwell Green on the first Sunday of the new year, to which the editor refused admission. The comrade who made it his business to pen notes of the new apostle's glowing words, had represented him as referring to the recognised leader in such very uncompromising terms, that to publish the report in the official columns would have been stultifying. In the lecture in question Roodhouse declared his adherence to the principles of assassination; he pronounced them the sole working principles; to deny to Socialists the right of assassination was to rob them of the very sinews of war. Men who affected to be revolutionists, but were in reality nothing more than rose-water romancers, would of course object to anything which looked like business; they liked to sit in their comfortable studies and pen daintily worded articles, thus earning for themselves a humanitarian reputation at a very cheap rate. That would not do; *à bas* all such penny-a-liner pretence! Blood and iron! that must be the revolutionists' watchword. Was it not by blood and iron that the

present damnable system was maintained? To arms, then—secretly, of course. Let tyrants be made to tremble upon their thrones in more countries than Russia. Let capitalists fear to walk in the daylight. This only was the path of progress.

It was thought by the judicious that Comrade Roodhouse would, if he repeated this oration, find himself the subject of a rather ugly indictment. For the present, however, his words were ignored, save in the Socialist body. To them, of course, he had addressed himself, and doubtless he was willing to run a little risk for the sake of a most practical end, that of splitting the party, and thus establishing a sovereignty for himself; this done, he could in future be more guarded. His reporter purposely sent 'copy' to Mr. Westlake which could not be printed, and the rejection of the report was the signal for secession. Comrade Roodhouse printed at his own expense a considerable number of leaflets, and sowed them broadcast in the Socialist meeting-places. There were not wanting disaffected brethren, who perused these appeals with satisfaction. Schism flourished.

Comrade Roodhouse was of course a man of no means, but he numbered among his followers two extremely serviceable men, one of them a practical printer who carried on a small business

in Camden Town; the other an oil merchant, who, because his profits had never exceeded a squalid two thousand a year, whereas another oil merchant of his acquaintance made at least twice as much, was embittered against things in general, and ready to assist any subversionary movement, yea, even with coin of the realm, on the one condition that he should be allowed to insert articles of his own composition in the new organ which it was proposed to establish. There was no difficulty in conceding this trifle, and the *Tocsin* was the result. The name was a suggestion of the oil merchant himself, and no bad name if Socialists at large could be supposed capable of understanding it; but the oil merchant was too important a man to be thwarted, and the argument by which he supported his choice was incontestable. 'Isn't it our aim to educate the people? Very well, then let them begin by knowing what *Tocsin* means. I shouldn't know myself if I hadn't come across it in the newspaper and looked it up in the dictionary; so there you are!'

And there was the *Tocsin*, a weekly paper like the *Fiery Cross*. The first number appeared in the middle of February, so admirably prepared were the plans of Comrade Roodhouse. It appeared on Friday; the next Sunday promised to be a lively day at Commonwealth Hall and elsewhere. At the original

head-quarters of the Union addresses were promised from two leading men, Comrades Westlake and Mutimer. Comrade Roodhouse would in the morning address an assembly on Clerkenwell Green; in the evening his voice would summon adherents to the meeting-place in Hoxton which had been the scene of our friend Richard's earliest triumphs. With few exceptions the Socialists of that region had gone over to the new man and the new paper.

Richard arrived in town on the Saturday, and went to the house in Highbury, whither disagreeable business once more summoned him. Alice, who, owing to her mother's resolute refusal to direct the household, had not as yet been able to spend more than a day or two with Richard and his wife, sent nothing but ill news to Wanley. Mrs. Mutimer seemed to be breaking down in health, and 'Arry was undisguisedly returning to evil ways. For the former, it was suspected—a locked door prevented certainty—that she had of late kept her bed the greater part of the day; a servant who met her downstairs in the early morning reported that she 'looked very bad indeed.' The case of the latter was as hard to deal with. 'Arry had long ceased to attend his classes with any regularity, and he was once more asserting the freeman's right to immunity from day labour. Moreover, he

claimed in practice the freeman's right to get drunk four nights out of the seven. No one knew whence he got his money; Richard purposely stinted him, but the provision was useless. Mr. Keene declared with lamentations that his influence over 'Arry was at an end; nay, the youth had so far forgotten gratitude as to frankly announce his intention of 'knockin' Keene's lights out' if he were further interfered with. To the journalist his 'lights' were indispensable; in no sense of the word did he possess too many of them; so it was clear that he must abdicate his tutorial functions. Alice implored her brother to come and 'do something.'

Richard, though a married man of only six weeks' standing, had troubles altogether in excess of his satisfactions. Things were not as they should have been in that earthly paradise called New Wanley. It was not to be expected that the profits of that undertaking would be worth speaking of for some little time to come, but it was extremely desirable that it should pay its own expenses, and it began to be doubtful whether even this moderate success was being achieved. Various members of the directing committee had visited New Wanley recently, and Richard had talked to them in a somewhat discouraging tone; his fortune was not limitless, it had to be remembered; a

considerable portion of old Mutimer's money had lain in the vast Belwick concern of which he was senior partner ; the surviving members of the firm were under no specified obligation to receive Richard himself as partner, and the product of the realised capital was a very different thing from the share in the profits which the old man had enjoyed. Other capital Richard had at his command, but already he was growing chary of encroachments upon principal. He began to murmur inwardly that the entire fortune did not lie at his disposal ; willingly he would have allowed Alice a handsome portion ; and as for 'Arry, the inheritance was clearly going to be his ruin. The practical difficulties at New Wanley were proving considerable ; the affair was viewed with hostility by ironmasters in general, and the results of such hostility were felt. But Richard was committed to his scheme ; all his ambitions based themselves thereupon. And those ambitions grew daily.

These greater troubles must to a certain extent solve themselves, but in Highbury it was evidently time, as Alice said, to 'do something.' His mother's obstinacy stood in the way of almost every scheme that suggested itself. Richard was losing patience with the poor old woman, and suffered the more from his irritation because he would so gladly have behaved to her with filial kindness. One plan there was to

which she might possibly agree, and even have pleasure in accepting it, but it was not easy to propose. The house in Wilton Square was still on his hands; upon the departure of Emma and her sister, a certain Mrs. Chattaway, a poor friend of old times, who somehow supported herself and a grandchild, had been put into the house as caretaker, for Richard could not sell all the furniture to which his mother was so attached, and he had waited for her return to reason before ultimately deciding how to act in that matter. Could he now ask the old woman to return to the Square, and, it might be, live there with Mrs. Chattaway? In that case both 'Arry and Alice would have to leave London.

On Saturday afternoon he had a long talk with his sister. To Alice also it had occurred that their mother's return to the old abode might be desirable.

'And you may depend upon it, Dick,' she said, 'she'll never rest again till she does get back. I believe you've only got to speak of it, and she'll go at once.'

'She'll think it unkind,' Richard objected. 'It looks as if we wanted to get her out of the way. Why on earth does she carry on like this? As if we hadn't bother enough!'

'Well, we can't help what she thinks. I believe it'll be for her own good. She'll be comfortable with Mrs. Chattaway, and that's

more than she'll ever be here. But what about 'Arry?'

'He'll have to come to Wanley. I shall find him work there — I wish I'd done so months ago.'

There were no longer the objections to 'Arry's appearance at Wanley that had existed previous to Richard's marriage; none the less the resolution was courageous, and proved the depth of Mutimer's anxiety for his brother. Having got the old woman to Wilton Square, and Alice to the Manor, it would have been easy enough to bid Mr. Henry Mutimer betake himself — whither his mind directed him. Richard could not adopt that rough-and-ready way out of his difficulty. Just as he suffered in the thought that he might be treating his mother unkindly, so he was constrained to undergo annoyances rather than abandon the hope of saving 'Arry from ultimate destruction.

'Will he live at the Manor?' Alice asked uneasily.

Richard mused; then a most happy idea struck him.

'I have it! He shall live with Rodman. The very thing! Rodman's the fellow to look after him. Yes; that's what we'll do.'

'And I'm to live at the Manor?'

'Of course.'

'You think Adela won't mind?'

‘Mind? How the deuce can she mind it?’

As a matter of form Adela would of course be consulted, but Richard had no notion of submitting practical arrangements in his own household to his wife’s decision.

‘Now we shall have to see mother,’ he said. ‘How’s that to be managed?’

‘Will you go and speak at her door?’

‘That be hanged! Confound it, has she gone crazy? Just go up and say I want to see her.’

‘If I say that, I’m quite sure she won’t come.’

Richard waxed in anger.

‘But she *shall* come! Go and say I want to see her, and that if she doesn’t come down I’ll force the door. There’ll have to be an end to this damned foolery. I’ve got no time to spend humbugging. It’s four o’clock, and I have letters to write before dinner. Tell her I must see her, and have done with it.’

Alice went upstairs with small hope of success. She knocked twice before receiving an answer.

‘Mother, are you there?’

‘What do you want?’ came back in a voice of irritation.

‘Dick’s here, and wants to speak to you. He says he *must* see you; it’s something very important.’

‘I’ve nothing to do with him,’ was the reply.

‘Will you see him if he comes up here?’

‘No, I won’t.’

Alice went down and repeated this. After a moment’s hesitation Mutimer ascended the stairs by threes. He rapped loudly at the bedroom door. No answer was vouchsafed.

‘Mother, you must either open the door or come downstairs,’ he cried with decision. ‘This has gone on long enough. Which will you do?’

‘I’ll do neither,’ was the angry reply. ‘What right have you to order me about, I’d like to know? You mind your business, and I’ll mind mine.’

‘All right. Then I shall send for a man at once, and have the door forced.’

Mrs. Mutimer knew well the tone in which these words were spoken; more than once ere now it had been the preliminary of decided action. Already Richard had reached the head of the stairs, when he heard a key turn, and the bedroom door was thrown open with such violence that the walls shook. He approached the threshold and examined the interior.

There was only one noticeable change in the appearance of the bedroom since he had last seen it. The dressing-table was drawn near to the fire, and on it were a cup and saucer, a few

plates, some knives, forks, and spoons, and a folded tablecloth. A kettle and a saucepan stood on the fender. Her bread and butter Mrs. Mutimer kept in a drawer. All the appointments of the chamber were as clean and orderly as could be.

The sight of his mother's face all but stilled Richard's anger; she was yellow and wasted; her hair seemed far more grizzled than he remembered it. She stood as far from him as she could get, in an attitude not devoid of dignity, and looked him straight in the face. He closed the door.

'Mother, I've not come here to quarrel with you,' Mutimer began, his voice much softened. 'What's done is done, and there's no helping it. I can understand you being angry at first, but there's no sense in making enemies of us all in this way. It can't go on any longer—neither for your sake nor ours. I want to talk reasonably, and to make some kind of arrangement.'

'You want to get me out o' the 'ouse. I'm ready to go, an' glad to go. I've earnt my livin' before now, an' I'm not so old but I can do it again. You always was one for talkin', but the fewest words is best. Them as talks most isn't allus the most straightfor'ard.'

'It isn't that kind of talk that 'll do any good, mother. I tell you again, I'm not going to use angry words. You know perfectly well I've

never behaved badly to you, and I'm not going to begin now. What I've got to say is that you've no right to go on like this. Whilst you've been shutting yourself up in this room, there's Alice living by herself, which it isn't right she should do ; and there's 'Arry going to the bad as fast as he can, and just because you won't help to look after him. If you'll only think of it in the right way, you'll see that's a good deal your doing. If 'Arry turns out a scamp and a blackguard, it's you that 'll be greatly to blame for it. You might have helped to look after him. I always thought you'd more common sense. You may say what you like about me, and I don't care ; but when you talk about working for your living, you ought to remember that there's work enough near at hand, if only you'd see to it.'

'I've nothing to do neither with you nor 'Arry nor Alice,' answered the old woman stubbornly. 'If 'Arry disgraces his name, he won't be the first as has done it. I done my best to bring you all up honest, but that was a long time ago, and things has changed. You're old enough to go your own ways, an' your ways isn't mine. I told you how it 'ud be, an' the only mistake I made was comin' to live here at all. Now I can't be left alone, an' I'll go. You've no call to tell me a second time.'

It was a long, miserable wrangle, lasting half

an hour, before a possibility of agreement presented itself. Richard at length ceased to recriminate, and allowed his mother to talk herself to satiety. He then said:

‘I’m thinking of giving up this house, mother. What I want to know is, whether it would please you to go back to the old place again? I ask you because I can think of no other way for putting you in comfort. You must say and think what you like, only just answer me the one question as I ask it—that is, honestly and good-temperedly. I shall have to take ’Arry away with me; I can’t let him go to the dogs without another try to keep him straight. Alice ’ll have to go with me too, at all events for a time. Whether we like it or not, she’ll have to accustom herself to new ways, and I see my way to helping her. I don’t know whether you’ve been told that Mrs. Chattaway’s been living in the house since the others went away. The furniture’s just as you left it; I dare say you’d feel it like going home again.’

‘They’ve gone, have they?’ Mrs. Mutimer asked, as if unwilling to show the interest which this proposal had excited in her.

‘Yes, they went more than a month ago. We put Mrs. Chattaway in just to keep the place in order. I look on the house as yours. You might let Mrs. Chattaway stay there still,

perhaps ; but that's just as you please. You oughtn't to live quite alone.'

Mrs. Mutimer did not soften, but, after many words, Richard understood her to agree to what he proposed. She had stood all through the dialogue ; now at length she moved to a seat, and sank upon it with trembling limbs. Richard wished to go, but had a difficulty in leaving abruptly. Darkness had fallen whilst they talked ; they only saw each other by the light of the fire.

'Am I to come and see you or not, mother, when you get back to the old quarters?'

She did not reply.

'You won't tell me?'

'You must come or stay away, as it suits you,' she said, in a tone of indifference.

'Very well, then I shall come, if it's only to tell you about 'Arry and Alice. And now will you let Alice come up and have some tea with you?'

There was no answer.

'Then I'll tell her she may,' he said kindly, and went from the room.

He found Alice in the drawing-room, and persuaded her to go up.

'Just take it as if there 'd been nothing wrong,' he said to his sister. 'She's had a wretched time of it, I can see that. Take some tea-cakes up with you, and talk about going

back to the Square as if she'd proposed it herself. We mustn't be hard with her just because she can't change, poor old soul.'

Socialistic business took him away during the evening. When he returned at eleven o'clock, 'Arry had not yet come in. Shortly before one there were sounds of ineffectual effort at the front-door latch. Mutimer, who happened to be crossing the hall, heard them, and went to open the door. The result was that his brother fell forward at full length upon the mat.

'Get up, drunken beast!' Richard exclaimed angrily.

'Beast yourself,' was the hiccupped reply, repeated several times whilst 'Arry struggled to his feet. Then, propping himself against the door-post, the maligned youth assumed the attitude of pugilism, inviting all and sundry to come on and have their lights extinguished. Richard flung him into the hall and closed the door. 'Arry had again to struggle with gravitation.

'Walk upstairs, if you can!' ordered his brother with contemptuous severity.

After much trouble 'Arry was got to his room, thrust in, and the door slammed behind him.

Richard was not disposed to argue with his brother this time. He waited in the dining-room next morning till the champion of liberty

presented himself; then, scarcely looking at him, said with quiet determination:

‘Pack your clothes some time to-day. You’re going to Wanley to-morrow morning.’

‘Not unless I choose,’ remarked ‘Arry.

‘You look here,’ exclaimed the elder, with concentrated savageness which did credit to his powers of command. ‘What you choose has nothing to do with it, and that you’ll please to understand. At half-past nine to-morrow morning you’re ready for me in this room; hear that? I’ll have an end to this kind of thing, or I’ll know the reason why. Speak a word of impudence to me and I’ll knock half your teeth out!’

He was capable of doing it. ‘Arry got to his morning meal in silence.

In the course of the morning Mr. Keene called. Mutimer received him in the dining-room, and they smoked together. Their talk was of the meetings to be held in the evening.

‘There’ll be nasty doings up there,’ Keene remarked, indicating with his head the gathering place of Comrade Roodhouse’s adherents.

‘Of what kind?’ Mutimer asked with indifference.

‘There’s disagreeable talk going about. Probably they’ll indulge in personalities a good deal.’

‘Of course they will,’ assented the other after a short pause. ‘Westlake, eh?’

‘Not only Westlake. There’s a more important man.’

Mutimer could not resist a smile, though he was uneasy. Keene understood the smile; it was always an encouragement to him.

‘What have they got hold of?’

‘I’m afraid there’ll be references to the girl.’

‘The girl?’ Richard hesitated. ‘What girl? What do you know about any girl?’

‘It’s only the gossip I’ve heard. I thought it would be as well if I went about among them last night just to pick up hints, you know.’

‘They’re talking about that, are they? Well, let them. It isn’t hard to invent lies.’

‘Just so,’ observed Mr. Keene sympathisingly. ‘Of course I know they’d twisted the affair.’

Mutimer glanced at him and smoked in silence.

‘I think I’d better be there to-night,’ the journalist continued. ‘I shall be more useful there than at the hall.’

‘As you like,’ said Mutimer lightly.

The subject was not pursued.

Though the occasion was of so much importance, Commonwealth Hall contained but a moderate audience when Mr. Westlake rose to

deliver his address. The people who occupied the benches were obviously of a different stamp from those wont to assemble at the Hoxton meeting-place. There were perhaps a dozen artisans of intensely sober appearance, and the rest were men and women who certainly had never wrought with their hands. Near Mrs. Westlake sat several ladies, her personal friends. Of the men other than artisans the majority were young, and showed the countenance which bespeaks meritorious intelligence rather than ardour of heart or brain. Of enthusiasts in the true sense none could be discerned. It needed but a glance over this assembly to understand how very theoretical were the convictions that had brought its members together.

Mr. Westlake's address was interesting, very interesting; he had prepared it with much care, and its literary qualities were admired when subsequently it saw the light in one of the leading periodicals. Now and then he touched eloquence; the sincerity animating him was unmistakable, and the ideal he glorified was worthy of a noble mind. Not in anger did he speak of the schism from which the movement was suffering; even his sorrow was dominated by a gospel of hope. Optimism of the most fervid kind glowed through his discourse; he grew almost lyrical in his anticipation of the good time coming. For to-night it seemed to

him that encouragement should be the prevailing note; it was always easy to see the dark side of things. Their work, he told his hearers, was but just beginning. They aimed at nothing less than a revolution, and revolutions were not brought about in a day. None of them would in the flesh behold the reign of justice; was that a reason why they should neglect the highest impulses of their nature and sit contented in the shadow of the world's mourning? He spoke with passion of the millions disinherited before their birth, with infinite tenderness of those weak ones whom our social system condemns to a life of torture just because they *are* weak. One loved the man for his great heart and for his gift of moving speech.

His wife sat, as she always did when listening intently, her body bent forward, one hand supporting her chin. Her eyes never quitted his face.

To the second speaker it had fallen to handle in detail the differences of the hour. Mutimer's exordium was not inspiring after the rich-rolling periods with which Mr. Westlake had come to an end; his hard voice contrasted painfully with the other's cultured tones. Richard was probably conscious of this, for he hesitated more than was his wont, seeking words which did not come naturally to him.

However, he warmed to his work, and was soon giving his audience clearly to understand how he, Richard Mutimer, regarded the proceedings of Comrade Roodhouse. Let us be practical—this was the burden of his exhortation. We are Englishmen—and women—not flighty, frothy foreigners. Besides, we have the blessing of free speech, and with the tongue and pen we must be content to fight, other modes of warfare being barbarous. Those who, in their inconsiderate zeal, had severed the Socialist body, were taking upon themselves a very grave responsibility; not only had they troubled the movement internally, but they would doubtless succeed in giving it a bad name with many who were hitherto merely indifferent, and who might in time have been brought over. Let it be understood that in this hall the true doctrine was preached, and that the *Fiery Cross* was the true organ of English Socialism as distinguished from foreign crazes. The strength of England had ever been her sobriety; Englishmen did not fly at impossibilities like noisy children. He would not hesitate to say that the revolutionism preached in the newspaper called the *Tocsin* was dangerous, was immoral. And so on.

Richard was not at his best this evening. You might have seen Mrs. Westlake abandon her attentive position, and lean back rather

wearily ; you might have seen a covert smile on a few of the more intelligent faces. It was awkward for Mutimer to be praising moderation in a movement directed against capital, and this was not exactly the audience for eulogies of Great Britain at the expense of other countries. The applause when the orator seated himself was anything but hearty. Richard knew it, and inwardly cursed Mr. Westlake for taking the wind out of his sails.

Very different was the scene in the meeting-room behind the coffee-shop. There, upon Comrade Roodhouse's harangue, followed a debate more stirring than any on the records of the Islington and Hoxton branch. The room was thoroughly full ; the roof rang with tempestuous acclamations. Messrs. Cowes and Cullen were in their glory ; they roared with delight at each depreciatory epithet applied to Mr. Westlake and his henchmen, and prompted the speakers with words and phrases of a rich vernacular. If anything, Comrade Roodhouse fell a little short of what was expected of him. His friends had come together prepared for gory language, but the murderous instigations of Clerkenwell Green were not repeated with the same crudity. The speaker dealt in negatives ; not thus and thus was the social millennium to be brought about, it was open to his hearers to conceive the practical course. For

the rest, the heresiarch had a mighty flow of vituperative speech. Aspirates troubled him, so that for the most part he cast them away, and the syntax of his periods was often anacoluthic; but these matters were of no moment.

Questions being called for, Mr. Cowes and Mr. Cullen of course started up simultaneously. The former gentleman got the ear of the meeting. With preliminary swaying of the hand, he looked round as one about to propound a question which would for ever establish his reputation for acumen. In his voice of quiet malice, with his frequent deliberate pauses, with the wonted emphasis on absurd pronunciations, he spoke somewhat thus:—

‘In the course of his address—I shall say nothin’ about its qualities, the time for discussion will come presently—our Comrade has said not a few ’ard things about certin individooals who put themselves forward as per-ractical Socialists——’

‘Not ’ard enough!’ roared a voice from the back of the room.

Mr. Cowes turned his lank figure deliberately, and gazed for a moment in the quarter whence the interruption had come. Then he resumed.

‘I agree with that involuntary exclamation. Certinly, not ’ard enough. And the question I wish to put to our Comrade is this: Is he, or

is he not, aweer of certin scandalous doin's on the part of one of these said individooals, I might say actions which, from the Socialist point of view, amount to crimes. If our Comrade is aweer of what I refer to, then it seems to me it was his dooty to distinctly mention it. If he was *not* aweer, then we in this neighbourhood shall be only too glad to enlighten him. I distinctly assert that a certain individooal we all have in our thoughts has proved himself a traitor to the cause of the people. Comrades will understand me. And that's the question I wish to put.'

Mr. Cowes had introduced the subject which a considerable number of those present were bent on publicly discussing. Who it was that had first spread the story of Mutimer's matrimonial concerns probably no one could have determined. It was not Daniel Dabbs, though Daniel, partly from genuine indignation, partly in consequence of slowly growing personal feeling against the Mutimers, had certainly supplied Richard's enemies with corroborative details. Under ordinary circumstances Mutimer's change of fortune would have seemed to his old mates a sufficient explanation of his behaviour to Emma Vine; they certainly would not have gone out of their way to condemn him. But Richard was by this time vastly unpopular with most of

those who had once glorified him. Envy had had time to grow, and was assisted by Richard's avoidance of personal contact with his Hoxton friends. When they spoke of him now it was with sneers and sarcasms. Some one had confidently asserted that the so-called Socialistic enterprise at Wanley was a mere pretence, that Mutimer was making money just like any other capitalist, and the leaguers of Hoxton firmly believed this. They encouraged one another to positive hatred of the working man who had suddenly become wealthy; his name stank in their nostrils. This, in a great measure, explained Comrade Roodhouse's success; personal feeling is almost always the spring of public action among the uneducated. In the excitement of the schism a few of the more energetic spirits had determined to drag Richard's domestic concerns into publicity. They suddenly became aware that private morality was at the root of the general good; they urged each other to righteous indignation in a matter for which they did not really care two straws. Thus Mr. Cowes's question was received with vociferous approval. Those present who did not understand the allusion were quickly enlightened by their neighbours. A crowd of Englishmen working itself into a moral rage is as glorious a spectacle as the world can show. Not one of these men but

heartily believed himself justified in reviling the traitor to his class, the betrayer of confiding innocence. Remember, too, how it facilitates speech to have a concrete topic on which to enlarge; in this matter a West End drawing-room and the Hoxton coffee-shop are akin. Regularity of procedure was at an end; question grew to debate, and debate was riot. Mr. Cullen succeeded Mr. Cowes and roared himself hoarse, defying the feeble protests of the chairman. He abandoned mere allusion, and rejoiced the meeting by declaring names. His example was followed by those who succeeded him.

Little did Emma think, as she sat working, Sunday though it was, in her poor room, that her sorrows were being blared forth to a gross assembly in venomous accusation against the man who had wronged her. We can imagine that the knowledge would not greatly have soothed her.

Comrade Roodhouse at length obtained a hearing. It was his policy to deprecate these extreme personalities, and in doing so he heaped on the enemy greater condemnation. There was not a little art in the heresiarch's modes of speech; the less obtuse appreciated him and bade him live for ever. The secretary of the branch busily took notes.

When the meeting had broken up into

groups, a number of the more prominent Socialists surrounded Comrade Roodhouse on the platform. Their talk was still of Mutimer, of his shameless hypocrisy, his greed, his infernal arrogance. Near at hand stood Mr. Keene; a word brought him into conversation with a neighbour. He began by repeating the prevalent abuse, then, perceiving that his hearer merely gave assent in general terms, he added:

‘I shouldn’t wonder, though, if there was some reason we haven’t heard of—I mean, about the girl, you know.’

‘Think so?’ said the other.

‘Well, I *have* heard it said—but then one doesn’t care to repeat such things.’

‘What’s that, eh?’ put in another man, who had caught the words.

‘Oh, nothing. Only the girl’s made herself scarce. Dare say the fault wasn’t altogether on one side.’

And Mr. Keene winked meaningly.

The hint spread among those on the platform. Daniel Dabbs happened to hear it repeated in a gross form.

‘Who’s been a-sayin’ that?’ he roared. ‘Where have you got that from, eh?’

The source was already forgotten, but Daniel would not let the calumny take its way unopposed. He harangued those about him with furious indignation.

‘If any man’s got a word to say against Emma Vine, let him come an’ say it to me, that’s all! Now look ’ere, all o’ you, I know that girl, and I know that anyone as talks like that about her tells a damned lie.’

‘Most like it’s Mutimer himself as has set it goin’,’ observed someone.

In five minutes all who remained in the room were convinced that Mutimer had sent an agent to the meeting for the purpose of assailing Emma Vine’s good name. Mr. Keene had already taken his departure, and no suspicious character was discernible; a pity, for the evening might have ended in a picturesque way.

But Daniel Dabbs went home to his brother’s public-house, obtained note-paper and an envelope, and forthwith indited a brief epistle which he addressed to the house in Highbury. It had no formal commencement, and ended with ‘Yours, &c.’ Daniel demanded an assurance that his former friend had not instigated certain vile accusations against Emma, and informed him that whatever answer was received would be read aloud at next Sunday’s meeting.

The one not wholly ignoble incident in that evening’s transactions.

CHAPTER VI.

IN the partial reconciliation between Mrs. Mutimer and her children there was no tenderness on either side. The old conditions could not be restored, and the habits of the family did not lend themselves to the polite hypocrisy which lubricates the wheels of the refined world. There was to be a parting, and probably it would be for life. In Richard's household his mother could never have a part, and when Alice married, doubtless the same social difficulty would present itself. It was not the future to which Mrs. Mutimer had looked forward, but, having said her say, she resigned herself and hardened her heart. At least she would die in the familiar home.

Richard had supper with his sister on his return from Commonwealth Hall, and their plans were discussed in further detail.

‘I want you,’ he said, ‘to go to the Square with mother to-morrow, and to stay there till Wednesday. You won't mind doing that?’

‘ I think she’d do every bit as well without me,’ said Alice.

‘ Never mind ; I should like you to go. I’ll take ’Arry down to-morrow morning, then I’ll come and fetch you on Wednesday. You’ll just see that everything’s comfortable in the house, and buy her a few presents, the kind of things she’d like.’

‘ I don’t suppose she’ll take anything.’

‘ Try, at all events. And don’t mind her talk ; it does no harm.’

In the morning came the letter from Daniel Dabbs. Richard read it without any feeling of surprise, still less with indignation, at the calumny of which it complained. During the night he had wondered uneasily what might have occurred at the Hoxton meeting, and the result was a revival of his ignoble anger against Emma. Had he not anxiety enough that she must bring him new trouble when he believed that all relations between him and her were at an end? Doubtless she was posing as a martyr before all who knew anything of her story; why had she refused his money, if not that her case might seem all the harder? It were difficult to say whether he really believed this; in a nature essentially egoistic, there is often no line to be drawn between genuine convictions and the irresponsible charges of resentment. Mutimer had so persistently trained himself to

regard Emma as in the wrong that it was no wonder if he had lost the power of judging sanely in any matter connected with her. Her refusal to benefit by his generosity had aggravated him; actually, no doubt, because she thus deprived him of a defence against his conscience.

He was not surprised that libellous rumours were afloat, simply because since his yesterday's conversation with Keene the thought of justifying himself in some such way—should it really prove necessary—had several times occurred to him, suggested probably by Keene's own words. That the journalist had found means of doing him this service was very likely indeed. He remembered with satisfaction that no hint of such a thing had escaped his own lips. Still, he was uneasy. Keene might have fallen short of prudence, with the result that Daniel Dabbs might be in a position to trace this calumny to him, Mutimer. It would not be pleasant if the affair, thus represented, came to the ears of his friends, particularly of Mr. Westlake.

He had just finished his breakfast, and was glancing over the newspaper in a dull and irritable mood, when Keene himself arrived. Mutimer expected him. Alice quitted the dining-room when he was announced, and 'Arry, who at the same moment came in for breakfast, was bidden go about his business,

and be ready to leave the house in half-an-hour.

‘What does this mean?’ Richard asked abruptly, handing the letter to his visitor.

Keene perused the crabbed writing, and uttered sundry ‘Ah’s’ and ‘Hum’s.’

‘Do you know anything about it?’ Mutimer continued, in a tone between mere annoyance and serious indignation.

‘I think I had better tell you what took place last night,’ said the journalist, with side glances. He had never altogether thrown off the deferential manner when conversing with his patron, and at present he emphasised it. ‘Those fellows carry party feeling too far; the proceedings were scandalous. It really was enough to make one feel that one mustn’t be too scrupulous in trying to stop their mouths. If I’m not mistaken, an action for defamation of character would lie against half-a-dozen of them.’

Mutimer was unfortunately deficient in sense of humour. He continued to scowl, and merely said: ‘Go on; what happened?’

Mr. Keene allowed the evening’s proceedings to lose nothing in his narration. He was successful in exciting his hearer to wrath, but, to his consternation, it was forthwith turned against himself.

‘And you tried to make things better by

going about telling what several of them would know perfectly well to be lies?' exclaimed Mutimer savagely. 'Who the devil gave you authority to do so?'

'My dear sir,' protested the journalist, 'you have quite mistaken me. I did not mean to admit that I had told lies. How could I for a moment suppose that a man of your character would sanction that kind of thing? Pooh, I hope I know you better! No, no; I merely in the course of conversation ventured to hint that, as you yourself had explained to me, there were reasons quite other than the vulgar mind would conceive for—for the course you had pursued. To my own apprehension such reasons are abundant, and, I will add, most conclusive. You have not endeavoured to explain them to me in detail; I trust you felt that I was not so dull of understanding as to be incapable of—of appreciating motives when sufficiently indicated. Situations of this kind are *never* to be explained grossly; I mean, of course, in the case of men of intellect. I flatter myself that I have come to know your ruling principles; and I will say that beyond a doubt your behaviour has been most honourable. Of course I was mistaken in trying to convey this to those I talked with last night; they misinterpreted me, and I might have expected it. We cannot give them the moral feelings which they

lack. But I am glad that the error has so quickly come to light. A mere word from you, and such a delusion goes no farther. I regret it extremely.'

Mutimer held the letter in his hand, and kept looking from it to the speaker. Keene's subtleties were not very intelligible to him, but, even with a shrewd suspicion that he was being humbugged, he could not resist a sense of pleasure in hearing himself classed with the superior men whose actions are not to be explained by the vulgar. Nay, he asked himself whether the defence was not in fact a just one. After all, was it not possible that his conduct had been praiseworthy? He recovered the argument by which he had formerly tried to silence disagreeable inner voices; a man in his position owed it to society to effect a union of classes, and private feeling must give way before the higher motive. He reflected for a moment when Keene ceased to speak.

'What did you say?' he then asked, still bluntly, but with less anger. 'Just tell me the words, as far as you can remember.'

Keene was at no loss to recall inoffensive phrases; in another long speech, full of cajolery sufficiently artful for the occasion, he represented himself as having merely protested against misrepresentations obviously sharpened by malice.

‘It is just possible that I made some reference to her *character*,’ he admitted, speaking more slowly, and as if desirous that no word should escape his hearer; ‘but it did not occur to me to guard against misunderstandings of the word. I might have remembered that it has such different meanings on the lips of educated and of uneducated men. You, of course, would never have missed my thoughts.’

‘If I might suggest,’ he added, when Mutimer kept silence, ‘I think, if you condescend to notice the letter at all, you should reply only in the most general terms. Who is this man Dabbs, I wonder, who has the impudence to write to you in this way?’

‘Oh, one of the Hoxton Socialists, I suppose,’ Mutimer answered carelessly. ‘I remember the name.’

‘A gross impertinence! By no means encourage them in thinking you owe explanations. Your position doesn’t allow anything of the kind.’

‘All right,’ said Richard, his ill-humour gone; ‘I’ll see to it.’

He was not able, after all, to catch the early train by which he had meant to take his brother to Wanley. He did not like to leave without some kind of good-bye to his mother, and Alice said that the old woman would not be ready to go before eleven o’clock. After

half an hour of restlessness he sat down to answer Daniel's letter. Keene's flattery had not been without its fruit. From anger which had in it an element of apprehension he passed to an arrogant self-confidence which character and circumstances were conspiring to make his habitual mood. It *was* a gross impertinence in Daniel to address him thus. What was the use of wealth if it did not exempt one from the petty laws binding on miserable hand-to-mouth toilers? He would have done with Emma Vine; his time was of too much value to the world to be consumed in wranglings about a work-girl. What if here and there someone believed the calumny? Would it do Emma any harm? That was most unlikely. On the whole, the misunderstanding was useful; let it take its course. Men with large aims cannot afford to be scrupulous in small details. Was not New Wanley a sufficient balance against a piece of injustice, which, after all, was only one of words?

He wrote :

‘DEAR SIR,—I have received your letter, but it is impossible for me to spend time in refuting idle stories. What's more, I cannot see that my private concerns are a fit subject for discussion at a public meeting, as I understand they have been made. You are at liberty to read this note when and where you please, and in

that intention let me add that the cause of Socialism will not be advanced by attacks on the character of those most earnestly devoted to it. I remain, yours truly,

‘RICHARD MUTIMER.’

It seemed to Richard that this was the very thing, alike in tone and phrasing. A week or two previously a certain statesman had written to the same effect in reply to calumnious statements, and Richard consciously made that letter his model. The statesman had probably been sounder in his syntax, but his imitator had, no doubt, the advantage in other points. Richard perused his composition several times, and sent it to the post.

At eleven o'clock Mrs. Mutimer descended to the hall, ready for her journey. She would not enter any room. Her eldest son came out to meet her, and got rid of the servant who had fetched a cab.

‘Good-bye for the present, mother,’ he said, giving his hand. ‘I hope you’ll find everything just as you wish it.’

‘If I don’t, I shan’t complain,’ was the cold reply.

The old woman had clad herself, since her retreat, in the garments of former days; and the truth must be told that they did not add to the dignity of her appearance. Probably no costume devisable could surpass in ignoble

ugliness the attire of an English working-class widow when she appears in the streets. The proximity of Alice, always becomingly clad, drew attention to the poor mother's plebeian guise. Richard, watching her enter the cab, felt for the first time a distinct shame. His feelings might have done him more credit but for the repulse he had suffered.

'Arry contented himself with standing at the front-room window, his hands in his pockets.

Later in the same day Daniel Dabbs, who had by chance been following the British workman's practice and devoting Monday to recreation, entered an omnibus in which Mrs. Clay was riding. She had a heavy bundle on her lap, shop-work which she was taking home. Daniel had already received Mutimer's reply, and was nursing a fit of anger. He seated himself by Kate's side, and conversed with her.

'Heard anything from *him* lately?' he asked, with a motion of the head which rendered mention of names unnecessary.

'Not we,' Kate replied bitterly, her eyes fixing themselves in scorn.

'No loss,' remarked Daniel, with an expression of disgust.

'He'll hear from *me* some day,' said the woman, 'and in a way as he won't like.'

The noise of the vehicle did not favour

conversation. Daniel waited till Kate got out, then he too descended, and walked along by her side. He did not offer to relieve her of the bundle—in primitive societies woman is naturally the burden-bearer.

‘I wouldn’t a’ thought it o’ Dick,’ he said, his head thrust forward, and his eyes turning doggedly from side to side. ‘They say as how too much money ain’t good for a man, but it’s changed *him* past all knowin’.’

‘He always had a good deal too much to say for himself,’ remarked Mrs. Clay, speaking with difficulty through her quickened breath, the bundle almost more than she could manage.

‘I wish just now as he’d say a bit more,’ said Daniel. ‘Now, see, here’s a letter I’ve just got from him. I wrote to him last night to let him know of things as was goin’ round at the lecture. There’s one or two of our men, you know, think he’d ought to be made to smart a bit for the way he’s treated Emma, and last night they up an’ spoke—you should just a’ heard them. Then someone set it goin’ as the fault wasn’t Dick’s at all. See what I mean? I don’t know who started that. I can’t think as he’d try to blacken a girl’s name just to excuse himself; that’s goin’ a bit too far.’

Mrs. Clay came to a standstill.

‘He’s been saying things of Emma?’ she cried. ‘Is that what you mean?’

‘Well, see now. I couldn’t believe it, an’ I don’t rightly believe it yet. I’ll read you the answer as he’s sent me.’

Daniel gave forth the letter, getting rather lost amid its pretentious periods, with the eccentric pauses and intonation of an uneducated reader. Standing in a busy thoroughfare, he and Kate almost blocked the pavement; impatient pedestrians pushed against them, and uttered maledictions.

‘I suppose that’s Dick’s new way o’ sayin’ he hadn’t nothin’ to do with it,’ Daniel commented at the end. ‘Money seems always to bring long words with it somehow. It seems to me he’d ought to speak plainer.’

‘Who’s done it, if he didn’t?’ Kate exclaimed, with shrill anger. ‘You don’t suppose there’s another man ’ud go about telling coward lies? The mean wretch! Says things about my sister, does he? I’ll be even with that man yet, never you mind.’

‘Well, I can’t believe it o’ Dick,’ muttered Dabbs. ‘He says ’ere, you see, as he hasn’t time to contradic’ “idle stories.” I suppose that means he didn’t start ’em.’

‘If he tells one lie, won’t he tell another?’ cried the woman. She was obliged to put down her bundle on a doorstep, and used the moment of relief to pour forth vigorous vituperation. Dick listened with an air half of

approval, half doggedly doubtful. He was not altogether satisfied with himself.

‘Well, I must get off ’ome,’ he said at length. ‘It’s only right as you should know what’s goin’ on. There’s no one believes a word of it, an’ that you can tell Emma. If I hear it repeated, you may be sure I’ll up an’ say what I think. It won’t go no further if I can stop it. Well, so long! Give my respects to your sister.’

Daniel waived his arm and made off across the street. Kate, clutching her bundle again, panted along by-ways; reaching the house-door she rang a bell twice, and Emma admitted her. They climbed together to an upper room, where Kate flung her burden on to the floor and began at once to relate with vehemence all that Daniel had told her. The calumny lost nothing in her repetition. After listening in surprise for a few moments, Emma turned away and quietly began to cut bread and butter for the children, who were having their tea.

‘Haven’t you got anything to say?’ cried her sister. ‘I suppose he’ll be telling his foul lies about me next. Oh, he’s a good-hearted man, is Mutimer! Perhaps you’ll believe me now! Are you going to let him talk what he likes about you?’

Since the abandonment of the house in Wilton Square, Kate had incessantly railed in

this way ; it was a joy to her to have discovered new matter for invective. Emma's persistent silence maddened her ; even now not a word was to be got from the girl.

' Can't you speak ? ' shrilled Mrs. Clay. ' If you don't do something, I let you know that I shall ! I'm not going to stand this kind o' thing, don't think it. If they talk ill of you they'll do the same of me. It's time that devil had something for himself. You might be made o' stone ! I only hope I may meet him in the streets, that's all ! I'll show him up, see if I don't ! I'll let all the people know what he is, the cur ! I'll do something to make him give me in charge, and then I'll tell it all out before the magistrates. I don't care what comes, I'll find some way of paying out that beast ! '

Emma turned angrily.

' Hold your tongue, Kate ! If you go on like this day after day we shall have to part ; I can't put up with it, so there now ! I've begged and prayed you to stop, and you don't pay the least heed to me ; I think you might have more kindness. You'll never make me say a single word about him, do what you will ; I've told you that many a time, and I mean what I say. Let him say what he likes and do what he likes. It's nothing to me, and it doesn't concern you. You'll drive me out of the house

again, like you did the other night. I can't bear it. Do you understand, Kate?—I can't bear it !'

Her voice shook, and there were tears of uttermost shame and misery in her eyes. The children sitting at the table, though accustomed to scenes of this kind, looked at the disputants with troubled faces, and at length the younger began to cry. Emma at once turned to the little one with smiles of reassurance. Kate would have preferred to deal slaps, but contented herself with taking a cup of tea to the fireside, and sulking for half an hour.

Emma unrolled the bundle of work, and soon the hum of the sewing-machine began, to continue late into the night.

CHAPTER VII.

You remember that one side of the valley in which stood New Wanley was clad with trees. Through this wood a public path made transverse ascent to the shoulder of the hill, a way little used save by Wanley ramblers in summer time. The section of the wood above the path was closed against trespassers ; among the copses below anyone might freely wander. In places it was scarcely possible to make a way for fern, bramble, and underwood, but elsewhere mossy tracks led one among hazels or under arches of foliage which made of the mid-day sky a cool, golden shimmer. One such track, abruptly turning round a great rock over the face of which drooped the boughs of an ash, came upon a little sloping lawn, which started from a high hazel-covered bank. The bank itself was so shaped as to afford an easy seat, shaded even when the grass in front was all sunshine.

Adela had long known this retreat, and had been accustomed to sit here with Letty, especially when she needed to exchange deep con-

fidences with her friend. Once, just as they were settling themselves upon the bank, they were startled by a movement among the leaves above, followed by the voice of someone addressing them with cheerful friendliness, and making request to be allowed to descend and join them. It was Hubert Eldon, just home for the long vacation. Once or twice subsequently the girls had met Hubert on the same spot; there had been a picnic here, too, in which Mrs. Eldon and Mrs. Waltham took part. But Adela always thought of the place as peculiarly her own. To others it was only a delightfully secluded corner of the wood, fresh and green; for her it had something intimately dear, as the haunt where she had first met her own self face to face and had heard the whispering of secrets as if by another voice to her tremulous heart.

She sat here one morning in July, six months after her marriage. It was more than a year since she had seen the spot, and on reaching it to-day it seemed to her less beautiful than formerly; the leafage was to her eyes thinner and less warm of hue than in earlier years, the grass had a coarser look and did not clothe the soil so completely. An impulse had brought her hither, and her first sense on arriving had been one of disappointment. Was the change in her way of seeing? or had the retreat indeed suffered,

perchance from the smoke of New Wanley? The disappointment was like that we experience in revisiting a place kept only in memory since childhood. Adela had not travelled much in the past year, but her growth in experience had put great tracts between her and the days when she came here to listen and wonder. It was indeed a memory of her childhood that led her into the wood.

She had brought with her a German book on Socialism and a little German dictionary. At the advice of Mr. Westlake, given some months ago on the occasion of a visit to the Manor, she had applied herself diligently to this study. But it was not only with a view to using the time that she had selected these books this morning. In visiting a scene which would strongly revive the past, instinct—rather than than conscious purpose—had bidden her keep firm hold upon the present. On experiencing her disillusion a sense of trouble had almost led her to retrace her steps at once, but she overcame this, and, seating herself on the familiar bank, began to toil through hard sentences. Such moments of self-discipline were of daily occurrence in her life; she kept watch and ward over her feelings and found in efforts of the mind a short way out of inner conflicts which she durst not suffer to pass beyond the first stage.

Near at hand there grew a silver birch.

Hubert Eldon, on one of the occasions when he talked here with Adela and Letty, had by chance let his eyes wander from Adela to the birch tree, and his fancy, just then active among tender images, suggested a likeness between that graceful, gleaming stem with its delicately drooping foliage and the sweet-featured girl who stood before him with her head bowed in unconscious loveliness. As the silver birch among the trees of the wood, so was Adela among the men and women of the world. And to one looking upon her by chance such a comparison might still have occurred. But in face she was no longer what she had then been. Her eyebrows, formerly so smooth and smiling, now constantly drew themselves together as if at a thought of pain or in some mental exertion. Her cheeks had none of their maiden colour. Her lips were closed too firmly, and sometimes trembled like those of old persons who have known much trouble.

In spite of herself her attention flagged from the hard, dull book; the spirit of the place was too strong for her, and, as in summers gone by, she was lost in vision. But not with eyes like these had she been wont to dream on the green branches or on the sward that lay deep in sunlight. On her raised lids sat the heaviness of mourning; she seemed to strain her

sight to something very far off, something which withdrew itself from her desire, upon which her soul called and called in vain. Her cheeks showed their thinness, her brow foretold the lines which would mark it when she grew old. It was a sob in her throat which called her back to consciousness, a sob which her lips, well-trained warders, would not allow to pass.

She forced herself to the book again, and for some minutes plied her dictionary with feverish zeal. Then there came over her countenance a strange gleam of joy, as if she triumphed in self-conquest. She smiled as she continued her work, clearly making a happiness of each mastered sentence. And, looking up with the smile still fixed, she found that her solitude was invaded. Letty Tew had just appeared round the rock which sheltered the green haven.

‘You here, Adela?’ the girl exclaimed. ‘How strange!’

‘Why strange, Letty?’

‘Oh, only because I had a sort of feeling that perhaps I might meet you. Not here, particularly,’ she added, as if eager to explain herself, ‘but somewhere in the wood. The day is so fine; it tempts one to walk about.’

Letty did not approach her friend as she would have done when formerly they met here. Her manner was constrained, almost timid; it

seemed an afterthought when she bent forward for the kiss. Since Adela's marriage the intercourse between them had been comparatively slight. For the first three months they had seen each other only at long intervals, in part owing to circumstances. After the fortnight she spent in London at the time of her marriage, Adela had returned to Wanley in far from her usual state of health; during the first days of February there had been a fear that she might fall gravely ill. Only in advanced spring had she begun to go beyond the grounds of the Manor, and it was still unusual for her to do so except in her carriage. Letty had acquiesced in the altered relations; she suffered, and for various reasons, but did not endeavour to revive an intimacy which Adela seemed no longer to desire. Visits to the Manor were from the first distressing to her; the natural subjects of conversation were those which both avoided, and to talk in the manner of mere acquaintances was scarcely possible. Of course this state of things led to remark. Mrs. Waltham was inclined to suspect some wrong feeling on Letty's side, though of what nature it was hard to determine. Alfred, on the other hand, took his sister's behaviour ill, more especially as he felt a distinct change in her manner to himself. Was the girl going to be spoiled by the possession of wealth? What on earth did she mean

by her reserve, her cold dignity? Wasn't Letty good enough for her now that she was lady of the Manor? Letty herself, when the subject was spoken of, pretended to recognise no change beyond what was to be expected. So far from being hurt, her love for Adela grew warmer during these months of seeming estrangement; her only trouble was that she could not go often and sit by her friend's side—sit silently, hand holding hand. That would have been better than speech, which misled, or at best was inadequate. Meantime she supported herself with the hope that love might some day again render her worthy of Adela's confidence. That her friend was far above her she had always gladly confessed; she felt it more than ever now that she tried in vain to read Adela's secret thoughts. The marriage was a mystery to her; to the last moment she had prayed that something might prevent it. Yet, now that Adela was Mrs. Mutimer, she conscientiously put away every thought of discontent, and only wondered what high motive had dictated the choice and—for such she knew it must be—the sacrifice.

'What are you reading?' Letty asked, sitting down on the bank at a little distance.

'It's hardly to be called reading. I have to look out every other word. It's a book

by a man called Schaeffle, on the "Social Question."

'Oh, yes,' said the girl, hazarding a conjecture that the work had something to do with Socialism. 'Of course that interests you.'

'I think I'm going to write a translation of it. My husband doesn't read German, and this book is important.'

'I suppose you are quite a Socialist, Adela?' Letty inquired, in a tone which seemed anxious to presuppose the affirmative answer. She had never yet ventured to touch on the subject.

'Yes, I am a Socialist,' said Adela firmly. 'I am sure anyone will be who thinks about it, and really understands the need for Socialism. Does the word still sound a little dreadful to you? I remember so well when it did to me. It was only because I knew nothing about it.'

'I don't think I have that excuse,' said the other. 'Alfred is constantly explaining. But, Adela——'

She paused, not quite daring to speak her thoughts. Adela smiled an encouragement.

'I was going to say—— I'm sure you won't be offended. But you still go to church?'

'Oh yes, I go to church. You mustn't think that everything Alfred insists upon belongs to Socialism. I believe that all Christians ought to be Socialists; I think it is part of our religion, if only we carry it out faithfully.'

‘But does Mr. Wyvern think so?’

‘Yes, he does; he does indeed. I talk with Mr. Wyvern frequently, and I never knew, before he showed me, how necessary it is for a Christian to be a Socialist.’

‘You surprise me, Adela. Yet he doesn’t confess himself a Socialist.’

‘Indeed, he does. When did you hear Mr. Wyvern preach a sermon without insisting on justice and unselfishness and love of our neighbour? If we try to be just and unselfish, and to love our neighbour as ourself, we help the cause of Socialism. Mr. Wyvern doesn’t deal with politics—it is not necessary he should. That is for men like my husband, who give their lives to the practical work. Mr. Wyvern confines himself to spiritual teaching. He would injure his usefulness if he went beyond that.’

Letty was awed by the exceeding change which showed itself not only in Adela’s ways of thought, but in her very voice and manner of speaking. The tone was so authoritative, so free from the diffidence which had formerly kept Adela from asserting strongly even her cherished faiths. She felt, too, that with the maiden hesitancy something else had gone, at all events in a great degree; something that it troubled her to miss; namely, that winning persuasiveness which had been one of the charac-

teristics that made Adela so entirely lovable. At present Mrs. Mutimer scarcely sought to persuade; she uttered her beliefs as indubitable. A competent observer might now and then have surmised that she felt it needful to remind herself of the creed she had accepted.

‘You were smiling when I first caught sight of you,’ Letty said, after reflecting for a moment. ‘Was it something in the book?’

Adela again smiled.

‘No, something in myself,’ she replied with an air of confidence.

‘Because you are happy, Adela?’

‘Yes, because I am happy.’

‘How glad I am to hear that, dear!’ Letty exclaimed, for the first time allowing herself to use the affectionate word. ‘You will let me be glad with you?’

Her hands stole a little forward, but Adela did not notice it, for she was gazing straight before her, with an agitated look.

‘Yes, I am very happy, I have found something to do in life. I was afraid at first that I shouldn’t be able to give my husband any help in his work; I seemed useless. But I am learning, and I hope soon to be of real use, if only in little things. You know that I have begun to give a tea to the children every Wednesday? They’re not in need of food and comforts, I’m glad to say; nobody wants in

New Wanley ; but it's nice to bring them together at the Manor, and teach them to behave gently to each other, and to sit properly at table, and things like that. Will you come and see them to-day ?'

'I shall be very pleased.'

'To-day I'm going to begin something new. After tea we shall have a reading. Mr. Wyvern sent me a book this morning—"Andersen's Fairy Tales."'

'Oh, I've read them. Yes, that'll do nicely. Read them "The Ugly Duckling," Adela ; it's a beautiful story. I thought perhaps you were going to read something—something instructive, you know.'

Adela laughed. It was Adela's laugh still, but not what it used to be.

'No, I want to amuse them. They get enough instruction in school. I hope soon to give another evening to the older girls. I wonder whether you would like to come and help me then ?'

'If only you would let me ! There is nothing I should like more than to do something for you.'

'But you mustn't do it for me. It must be for the girls' sake.'

'Yes, for theirs as well, but ever so much more for yours, dear. You can't think how glad I am that you have asked me.'

Again the little hand was put forward, and this time Adela took it. But she did not soften as she once would have done. With eyes still far away, she talked for some minutes of the hopes with which her life was filled. Frequently she made mention of her husband, and always as one to whom it was a privilege to devote herself. Her voice had little failings and uncertainties now and then, but this appeared to come of excessive feeling.

They rose and walked from the wood together.

‘Alfred wants us to go to Malvern for a fortnight,’ Letty said, when they were near the gates of the Manor. ‘We were wondering whether you could come, Adela?’

‘No, I can’t leave Wanley,’ was the reply. ‘My husband’—she never referred to Mutimer otherwise than by this name—‘spoke of the seaside the other day, but we decided not to go away at all. There is so much to be done.’

When Adela went to the drawing-room just before luncheon, she found Alice Mutimer engaged with a novel. Reading novels had become an absorbing occupation with Alice. She took them to bed with her so as to read late, and lay late in the morning for the same reason. She must have been one of Mr. Mudie’s most diligent subscribers. She had no

taste for walking in the country, and could only occasionally be persuaded to take a drive. It was not surprising that her face had not quite the healthy colour of a year ago; there was negligence, too, in her dress, and she had grown addicted to recumbent attitudes. Between her and Adela no semblance of friendship had yet arisen, though the latter frequently sought to substitute a nearer relation for superficial friendliness. Alice never exhibited anything short of good-will, but her first impressions were lasting; she suspected her sister-in-law of a desire to patronise, and was determined to allow nothing of the kind. With a more decided character, Alice's prepossessions would certainly have made life at the Manor anything but smooth; as it was, nothing ever occurred to make unpleasantness worth her while. Besides, when not buried in her novels, she gave herself up to absent-mindedness; Adela found conversation with her almost impossible, for Alice would answer a remark with a smiling 'Yes' or 'No,' and at once go off into dreamland, so that one hesitated to disturb her.

'What time is it?' she inquired, when she became aware of Adela moving about the room.

'All but half-past one.'

'Really? I suppose I must go and get

ready for lunch. What a pity we can't do without meals!'

'You should go out in the morning and get an appetite. Really, you are getting very pale, Alice. I'm sure you read far too much.'

Adela had it on her lips to say 'too many novels,' but was afraid to administer a direct rebuke.

'Oh, I like reading, and I don't care a bit for going out.'

'What about your practising?' Adela asked, with a playful shake of the head.

'Yes, I know it's very neglectful, but really it is such awful work.'

'And your French?'

'I'll make a beginning to-morrow. At least, I think I will. I don't neglect things wilfully, but it's so awfully hard to really get at it when the time comes.'

The luncheon-bell rang, and Alice, with a cry of dismay, sped to her room. She knew that her brother was to lunch at home to-day, and Richard was terrible in the matter of punctuality.

As soon as the meal was over Alice hastened back to her low chair in the drawing-room. Richard and his wife went together into the garden.

'What do you think Rodman's been advising me this morning?' Mutimer said, speaking

with a cigar in his mouth. 'It's a queer idea ; I don't quite know what to think of it. You know there'll be a general election some time next year, and he advises me to stand for Belwick.'

He did not look at his wife. Coming to a garden-seat, he put up one foot upon it, and brushed the cigar ash against the back. Adela sat down ; she had not replied at once, and was thoughtful.

'As a Socialist candidate?' she asked, when at length he turned his eyes to her.

'Well, I don't know. Radical rather, I should think. It would come to the same thing, of course, and there'd be no use in spoiling the thing for the sake of a name.'

Adela had a Japanese fan in her hand ; she put it against her forehead, and still seemed to consider.

'Do you think you could find time for Parliament?'

'That has to be thought of, of course ; but by then I should think we might arrange it. There's not much that Rodman can't see to.'

'You are inclined to think of it?'

Adela's tone to her husband was not one of tenderness, but of studious regard and deference. She very seldom turned her eyes to his, but there was humility in her bent look.

If ever he and she began to speak at the same time, she checked herself instantly, and Mutimer had no thought of giving her precedence. This behaviour in his wife struck him as altogether becoming.

‘I almost think I am,’ he replied. ‘I’ve a notion I could give them an idea or two at Westminster. It would be news to them to hear a man say what he really thinks.’

Adela smiled faintly, but said nothing.

‘Would you like me to be in Parliament?’ Richard asked, putting down his foot and leaning back his head a little.

‘Certainly, if you feel that it is a step gained.’

‘That’s just what I think it would be. Well, we must talk about it again. By-the-by, I’ve just had to send a fellow about his business.’

‘To discharge a man?’ Adela asked, with pain.

‘Yes. It’s that man Rendal ; I was talking about him the other day, you remember. He’s been getting drunk ; I’ll warrant it’s not the first time.’

‘And you really must send him away ? Couldn’t you give him another chance ?’

‘No. He was impudent to me, and I can’t allow that. He’ll have to go.’

Richard spoke with decision. When the

fact of impudence was disclosed Adela felt that it was useless to plead. She looked at her fan and was sorrowful.

‘So you are going to read to the youngsters to-day?’ Mutimer recommenced.

‘Yes; Mr. Wyvern has given me a book that will do very well indeed.’

‘Oh, has he?’ said Richard doubtfully. ‘Is it a religious book? That kind of thing won’t do, you know.’

‘No, it isn’t religious at all. Only a book of fairy tales.’

‘Fairy tales!’ There was scorn in his way of repeating the words. ‘Couldn’t you find something useful? A history book, you know, or about animals, or something of that kind. We musn’t encourage them in idle reading. And that reminds me of Alice. You really must get her away from those novels. I can’t make out what’s come to the girl. She seems to be going off her head. Did you notice at lunch?—she didn’t seem to understand what I said to her. Do try and persuade her to practise, if nothing else.’

‘I am afraid to do more than just advise in a pleasant way,’ said Adela.

‘Well, I shall lose my temper with her before long.’

‘How is Harry doing?’ Adela asked, to pass over the difficult subject.

‘He’s an idle scamp! If some one ’ud give him a good thrashing, that’s what *he* wants.’

‘Shall I ask him to dinner to-morrow?’

‘You can if you like, of course,’ Richard replied with hesitation. ‘I shouldn’t have thought you cared much about having him.’

‘Oh, I am always very glad to have him. I have meant to ask you to let him dine with us oftener. I am so afraid he should think we neglect him, and that would be sure to have a bad effect.’

Mutimer looked at her with satisfaction, and assented to her reasoning.

‘But about the fairy tales,’ Adela said presently, when Richard had finished his cigar and was about to return to the works. ‘Do you seriously object to them? Of course I could find another book.’

‘What do *you* think? I’m rather surprised that Wyvern suggested reading of that kind; he generally has good ideas.’

‘I fancy he wished to give the children a better kind of amusement,’ said Adela, with hesitation.

‘A better kind, eh? Well, do as you like. I dare say it’s no great harm.’

‘But if you really——’

‘No, no; read the tales. I dare say they wouldn’t listen to a better book.’

It was not very encouraging, but Adela

ventured to abide by the vicar's choice. She went to her own sitting-room and sought the story that Letty had spoken of. From 'The Ugly Duckling' she was led on to the story of the mermaid, from that to the enchanted swans. The book had never been in her hands before, and the delight she received from it was of a kind quite new to her. She had to make an effort to close it and turn to her specified occupations. For Adela had so systematised her day that no minute's margin was left for self-indulgence. Her reading was serious study. If ever she was tempted to throw open one of the volumes which Alice left about, a glance at the pages was enough to make her push it away as if it were impure. She had read very few stories of any kind, and of late had felt a strong inclination towards such literature; the spectacle of Alice's day-long absorption was enough to excite her curiosity, even if there had not existed other reasons. But these longings for a world of romance she crushed down as unworthy of a woman to whom life had revealed its dread significances; and, though she but conjectured the matter and tone of the fiction Alice delighted in, instinctive fear would alone have restrained her from it. For pleasure in the ordinary sense she did not admit into her scheme of existence; the season for that had gone by. Henceforth she must think, and work, and pray.

Therefore she had set herself gladly to learn German; it was a definite task to which such and such hours could be devoted, and the labour would strengthen her mind. Her ignorance she represented as a great marsh which by toil had to be filled up and converted into solid ground. She had gone through the library catalogue and made a list of books which seemed needful to be read; and Mr. Wyvern had been of service in guiding her, as well as in lending volumes from his own shelves. The vicar, indeed, had surprised her by the zealous kindness with which he entered into all her plans; at first she had talked to him with apprehension, remembering that chance alone had prevented her from appealing to him to save her from this marriage. But Mr. Wyvern, with whose philosophy we have some acquaintance, exerted himself to make the best of the irremediable, and Adela already owed him much for his unobtrusive moral support. Even Mutimer was putting aside his suspicions and beginning to believe that the clergyman would have openly encouraged Socialism had his position allowed him to do so. He was glad to see his wife immersed in grave historical and scientific reading; he said to himself that in this way she would be delivered from her religious prejudices, and some day attain to 'free thought.' Adela as yet had no such end in view, but

already she understood that her education, in the serious sense, was only now beginning. As a girl, her fate had been that of girls in general ; when she could write without orthographical errors, and could play by rote a few pieces of pianoforte music, her education had been pronounced completed. In the profound moral revolution which her nature had recently undergone her intellect also shared ; when the first numbing shock had spent itself, she felt the growth of an intellectual appetite formerly unknown. Resolutely setting herself to exalt her husband, she magnified his acquirements, and, as a duty, directed her mind to the things he deemed of importance. One of her impulses took the form of a hope which would have vastly amused Richard had he divined it. Adela secretly trusted that some day her knowledge might be sufficient to allow her to cope with her husband's religious scepticism. It was significant that she could face in this way the great difficulty of her life ; the stage at which it seemed sufficient to iterate creeds was already behind her. Probably Mr. Wyvern's conversation was not without its effect in aiding her to these larger views, but she never spoke to him on the subject directly. Her native dignity developed itself with her womanhood, and one of the characteristics of the new Adela was a reserve which at times

seemed to indicate coldness or even spiritual pride.

The weather made it possible to spread the children's tea in the open air. At four o'clock Letty came, and was quietly happy in being allowed to superintend one of the tables. Adela was already on affectionate terms with many of the little ones, though others regarded her with awe rather than warmth of confidence. This was strange, when we remember how childlike she had formerly been with children. But herein, too, there was a change ; she could not now have caught up Letty's little sister and trotted with her about the garden as she was used to do. She could no longer smile in the old simple, endearing way ; it took some time before a child got accustomed to her eyes and lips. Her movements, though graceful as ever, were subdued to matronly gravity ; never again would Adela turn and run down the hill, as after that meeting with Hubert Eldon. But her sweetness was in the end irresistible to all who came within the circle of its magic. You saw its influence in Letty, whose eyes seemed never at rest save when they were watching Adela, who sprang to her side with delight if the faintest sign did but summon her. You saw its influence, moreover, when, the tea over, the children ranged themselves on the lawn to hear her read. After the first few sentences,

everywhere was profoundest attention; the music of her sweetly modulated voice, the art which she learnt only from nature, so allied themselves with the beauty of the pages she read that from beginning to end not a movement interrupted her.

Whilst she was reading a visitor presented himself at the Manor, and asked if Mrs. Mutimer was at home. The servant explained how and where Mrs. Mutimer was engaged, for the party was held in a quarter of the garden hidden from the approach to the front door.

‘Is Miss Mutimer within?’ was the visitor’s next inquiry.

Receiving an affirmative reply, he begged that Miss Mutimer might be informed of Mr. Keene’s desire to see her. And Mr. Keene was led to the drawing-room.

Alice was reposing on a couch; she did not trouble herself to rise when the visitor entered, but held a hand to him, at the same time scarcely suppressing a yawn. Novel reading has a tendency to produce this expression of weariness. Then she smiled, as one does in greeting an old acquaintance.

‘Who ever would have expected to see you!’ she began, drawing away her hand when it seemed to her that Mr. Keene had detained it quite long enough. ‘Does Dick expect you?’

‘Your brother does not expect me, Miss Mutimer,’ Keene replied. He invariably began conversation with her in a severely formal and respectful tone, and to-day there was melancholy in his voice.

‘You’ve just come on your own—because you thought you would?’

‘I have come because I could not help it, Miss Mutimer. It is more than a month since I had the happiness of seeing you.’

He stood by the couch, his body bent in deference, his eyes regarding her with melancholy homage.

‘Mrs. Mutimer has a tea-party of children from New Wanley,’ said Alice with a provoking smile. ‘Won’t you go and join them? She’s reading to them, I believe; no doubt it’s something that would do you good.’

‘Of course I will go if you send me. I would go anywhere at your command.’

‘Then please do. Turn to the right when you get out into the garden.’

Keene stood for an instant with his eyes on the ground, then sighed deeply—groaned, in fact—smote his breast, and marched towards the door like a soldier at drill. As soon as he had turned his back Alice gathered herself from the couch, and, as soon as she stood upright, called to him:

‘Mr. Keene!’

He halted and faced round.

‘ You needn’t go unless you like, you know.’

He almost ran towards her.

‘ Just ring the bell, will you? I want some tea, and I’ll give you a cup if you care for it.’

She took a seat, and indicated with a finger the place where he might repose. It was at a three yards’ distance. Then they talked as they were wont to, with much coquetry on Alice’s side, and on Keene’s always humble submissiveness tempered with glances and sighs. They drank tea, and Keene used the opportunity of putting down his cup to take a nearer seat.

‘ Miss Mutimer——’

‘ Yes?’

‘ Is there any hope for me? You remember you said I was to wait a month, and I’ve waited longer.’

‘ Yes, you have been very good,’ said Alice, smiling loftily.

‘ Is there any hope for me?’ he repeated, with an air of encouragement.

‘ Less than ever,’ was the girl’s reply, lightly given, indeed, but not to be mistaken for a jest.

‘ You mean that? Come, now, you don’t really mean that? There must be, at all events, as much hope as before.’

‘There isn’t. There never was so little hope. There’s no hope at all, *not a scrap!*’

She pressed her lips and looked at him with a grave face. He too became grave, and in a changed way.

‘I am not to take this seriously?’ he asked with bated breath.

‘You are. There’s not one scrap of hope, and it’s better you should know it.’

‘Then—there—there must be somebody else?’ he groaned, his distress no longer humorous.

Alice continued to look him in the face for a moment, and at length nodded twice.

‘There *is* somebody else?’

She nodded three times.

‘Then I’ll go. Good-bye, Miss Mutimer. Yes, I’ll go.’

He did not offer to shake hands, but bowed and moved away dejectedly.

‘But you’re not going back to London?’ Alice asked.

‘Yes.’

‘You’d better not do that. They’ll know you’ve called. You’d far better stay and see Dick; don’t you think so?’

He shook his head and still moved towards the door.

‘Mr. Keene!’ Alice raised her voice. ‘Please do as I tell you. It isn’t my fault, and

I don't see why you should pay no heed to me all at once. Will you attend to me, Mr. Keene?'

'What do you wish me to do?' he asked, only half turning.

'To go and see Mrs. Mutimer in the garden, and accept her invitation to dinner.'

'I haven't got a dress-suit,' he groaned.

'No matter. If you go away I'll never speak to you again, and you know you wouldn't like that.'

He gazed at her miserably—his face was one which lent itself to a miserable expression, and the venerable appearance of his frockcoat and light trousers filled in the picture of mishap.

'Have you been joking with me?'

'No, I've been telling you the truth. But that's no reason why you break loose all at once. Please do as I tell you; go to the garden now and stop to dinner. I am not accustomed to ask a thing twice.'

She was almost serious. Keene smiled in a sickly way, bowed, and went to do her bidding.

CHAPTER VIII.

AMONG the little girls who had received invitations to the tea-party were two named Rendal, the children of the man whose dismissal from New Wanley had been announced by Mutimer. Adela was rather surprised to see them in the garden. They were eight and nine years-old respectively, and she noticed that both had a troubled countenance, the elder showing signs of recent tears. She sought them out particularly for kind words during tea-time. After the reading she noticed them standing apart, talking to each other earnestly ; she saw also that they frequently glanced at her. It occurred to her that they might wish to say something and had a difficulty in approaching. She went to them, and a question or two soon led the elder girl to disclose that she was indeed desirous of speaking in private. Giving a hand to each, she drew them a little apart. Then both children began to cry, and the elder sobbed out a pitiful story. Their mother was wretchedly ill and had sent them to implore Mrs. Mutimer's good

word that the father might be allowed another chance. It was true he had got drunk—the words sounded terrible to Adela from the young lips—but he vowed that henceforth he would touch no liquor. It was ruin to the family to be sent away; Rendal might not find work for long enough; there would be nothing for it but to go to a Belwick slum as long as their money lasted, and thence to the work-house. For it was well understood that no man who had worked at New Wanley need apply to the ordinary employers; they would have nothing to do with him. The mother would have come herself, but could not walk the distance.

Adela was pierced with compassion.

‘I will do my best,’ she said, as soon as she could trust her voice. ‘I promise you I will do my best.’

She could not say more, and the children evidently hoped she would have been able to grant their father’s pardon forthwith. They had to be content with Adela’s promise, which did not sound very cheerful, but meant more than they could understand.

She could not do more than give such a promise, and even as she spoke there was a coldness about her heart. The coldness became a fear when she met her husband on his return from the works. Richard was not in the same

good temper as at mid-day. He was annoyed to find Keene in the house—of late he had grown to dislike the journalist very cordially—and he had heard that the Rendal children had been to the party, which enraged him. You remember he accused the man of impudence in addition to the offence of drunkenness. Rendal, foolishly joking in his cups, had urged as extenuation of his own weakness the well-known fact that 'Arry Mutimer had been seen one evening unmistakably intoxicated in the street of Wanley village. Someone reported these words to Richard, and from that moment it was all over with the Rendals.

Adela, in her eagerness to plead, quite forgot (or perhaps she had never known) that with a certain order of men it is never wise to prefer a request immediately before dinner. She was eager, too, to speak at once; a fear, which she would not allow to become definite, drove her upon the undertaking without delay. Meeting Richard on the stairs she begged him to come to her room.

'What is it?' he asked with small ceremony, as soon as the door closed behind him.

She mastered her voice, and spoke with a sweet clearness of advocacy which should have moved his heart to proud and noble obeisance. Mutimer was not very accessible to such emotions.

‘It’s like the fellow’s impertinence,’ he said, ‘to send his children to you. I’m rather surprised you let them stay after what I had told you. Certainly I shall not overlook it. The thing’s finished! it’s no good talking about it.’

The fear had passed, but the coldness about her heart was more deadly. For a moment it seemed as if she could not bring herself to utter another word; she drew apart, she could not raise her face, which was beautiful in marble pain. But there came a rush of such hot anguish as compelled her to speak again. Something more than the fate of that poor family was at stake. Is not the quality of mercy indispensable to true nobleness? Had she voiced her very thought, Adela would have implored him to exalt himself in her eyes, to do a good deed which cost him some little effort over himself. For she divined with cruel certainty that it was not the principle that made him unyielding.

‘Richard, are you sure that the man has offended before?’

‘Oh, of course he has. I’ve no doubt of it. I remember feeling uncertain when I admitted him first of all. I didn’t like his look.’

‘But you have not really had to complain of him before. Your suspicions *may* be groundless. And he has a good wife, I feel sure of that. The children are very clean and nicely

dressed. She will help him to avoid drink in future. It is impossible for him to fall again, now that he knows how dreadful the results will be to his wife and his little girls.'

'Pooh! What does he care about them? If I begin letting men off in that way, I shall be laughed at. There's an end of my authority. Don't bother your head about them. I must go and get ready for dinner.'

An end of *my* authority. Yes, was it not the intelligence of her maiden heart returning to her? She had no pang from the mere refusal of a request of hers; Richard had never affected tenderness—not what she understood as tenderness—and she did not expect it of him. The union between them had another basis. But the understanding of his motives was so terribly distinct in her! It had come all at once; it was like the exposure of something dreadful by the sudden raising of a veil. And had she not known what the veil covered? Yet for the poor people's sake, for his own sake, she must try the woman's argument.

'Do you refuse me, Richard? I will be guarantee for him. I promise you he shall not offend again. He shall apologise humbly to you for his—his words. You won't really refuse me?'

'What nonsense! How can you promise for him, Adela? Ask for something reason-

able, and you may be sure I shan't refuse you. The fellow has to go as a warning. It mustn't be thought we're only playing at making rules. I can't talk any more; I shall keep dinner waiting.'

Pride helped her to show a smooth face through the evening, and in the night she conquered herself anew. She expelled those crying children from her mind; she hardened her heart against their coming misery. It was wrong to judge her husband so summarily; nay, she had not judged him, but had given way to a wicked impulse, without leaving herself a moment to view the case. Did he not understand better than she what measures were necessary to the success of his most difficult undertaking? And then was it certain that expulsion meant ruin to the Rendals? Richard would insist on the letter of the regulations, just, as he said, for the example's sake; but of course he would see that the man was put in the way of getting new employment and did not suffer in the meantime. In the morning she made atonement to her husband.

'I was wrong in annoying you yesterday,' she said as she walked with him from the house to the garden gate. 'In such things you are far better able to judge. You won't let it trouble you?'

It was a form of asceticism; Adela had a joy

in humbling herself and crushing her rebel instincts. She even raised her eyes to interrogate him. On Richard's face was an uneasy smile, a look of puzzled reflection. It gratified him intensely to hear such words, yet he could not hear them without the suspicions of a vulgar nature brought in contact with nobleness.

‘Well, yes,’ he replied, ‘I think you were a bit too hasty; you’re not practical, you see. It wants a practical man to manage those kind of things.’

The reply was not such as completes the blessedness of pure submission. Adela averted her eyes. Another woman would perchance have sought to assure herself that she was right in crediting him with private benevolence to the family he was compelled to visit so severely. Such a question Adela could not ask. It would have been to betray doubt; she imagined a replying glance which would shame her. To love, to honour, to obey:—many times daily she repeated to herself that threefold vow, and hitherto the first article had most occupied her striving heart. But she must not neglect the second; perhaps it came first in natural order.

At the gate Richard nodded to her kindly.

‘Good-bye. Be a good girl.’

What was it that caused a painful flutter at her heart as he spoke so? She did not answer,

but watched him for a few moments as he walked away.

Did *he* love *her*? The question which she had not asked herself for a long time came of that heart-tremor. She had been living so unnatural a life for a newly wedded woman, a life in which the intellect and the moral faculties held morbid predominance. 'Be a good girl.' How was it that the simple phrase touched her to emotion quite different in kind from anything she had known since her marriage, more deeply than any enthusiasm, as with a comfort more sacred than any she had known in prayer? As she turned to go back to the house a dizziness affected her eyes; she had to stand still for a moment. Involuntarily she clasped her hands upon her bosom and looked away into the blue summer sky. Did he love her? She had never asked him that, and all at once she felt a longing to hasten after him and utter the question. Would he know what she meant?

Was it the instantaneous reward for having conscientiously striven to honour him? That there should be love on his side had not hitherto seemed of so much importance; probably she had taken it for granted; she had been so pre-occupied with her own duties. Yet now it had all at once become of moment that she should know. 'Be a good girl.' She repeated the words over and over again, and made

much of them. Perhaps she had given him no opportunity, no encouragement, to say all he felt; she knew him to be reserved in many things.

As she entered the house the dizziness again troubled her. But it passed as before.

Mr. Keene, who had stayed over-night, was waiting to take leave of her; the trap which would carry him to Agworth Station had just driven up. Adela surprised the poor journalist by the warmth with which she shook his hand, and the kindness of her farewell. She was not deceived as to the motive of his visit, and just now she allowed herself to feel sympathy for him, though in truth she did not like the man.

This morning she could not settle to her work. The dreaming mood was upon her, and she appeared rather to encourage it, seeking a quiet corner of the garden and watching for a whole hour the sun-dappled trunk of a great elm. At times her face seemed itself to be a source of light, so vivid were the thoughts that transformed it. Her eyes were moist once or twice, and then no dream of artist-soul ever embodied such passionate loveliness, such holy awe, as came to view upon her countenance. At lunch she was almost silent, but Alice, happening to glance at her, experienced a surprise; she had

never seen Adela so beautiful and so calmly bright.

After lunch she attired herself for walking, and went to the village to see her mother. Lest Mrs. Waltham should be lonely, it had been arranged that Alfred should come home every evening, instead of once a week. Even thus, Adela had frequently reproached herself for neglecting her mother. Mrs. Waltham, however, enjoyed much content. The material comforts of her life were considerably increased, and she had many things in anticipation. Adela's unsatisfactory health rendered it advisable that the present year should pass in quietness, but Mrs. Waltham had made up her mind that before long there should be a house in London, with the delights appertaining thereto. She did not feel herself at all too old to enjoy the outside view of a London season; more than that it would probably be difficult to obtain just yet. To-day she was in excellent spirits, and welcomed her daughter exuberantly.

'You haven't seen Letty yet?' she asked. 'To-day, I mean.'

'No. Has she some news for me?'

'Alfred has an excellent chance of promotion. That old Wilkinson is dead, and he thinks there's no doubt he'll get the place. It would be two hundred and fifty a year.'

'That's good news, indeed.'

Of course it would mean Letty's immediate marriage. Mrs. Waltham discussed the prospect in detail. No doubt the best and simplest arrangement would be for the pair to live on in the same house. For the present, of course. Alfred was now firm on the commercial ladder, and in a few years his income would doubtless be considerable; then a dwelling of a very different kind could be found. With the wedding, too, she was occupying her thoughts.

'Yours was not quite what it ought to have been, Adela. I felt it at the time, but then things were done in such a hurry. Of course the church must be decorated. The breakfast you will no doubt arrange to have at the Manor. Letty ought to have a nice, a really nice *trousseau*; I know you will be kind to her, my dear.'

As Alice had done, Mrs. Waltham noticed before long that Adela was far brighter than usual. She remarked upon it.

'You begin to look really well, my love. It makes me happy to see you. How much we have to be thankful for! I've had a letter this morning from poor Lizzie Henbane; I must show it you. They're in such misery as never was. Her husband's business is all gone to nothing, and he is cruelly unkind to her. How thankful we ought to be!'

'Surely not for poor Lizzie's unhappiness!'

said Adela, with a return of her maiden archness.

‘On our own account, my dear. We have had so much to contend against. At one time, just after your poor father’s death, things looked very cheerless; I used to fret dreadfully on your account. But everything, you see, was for the best.’

Adela had something to say and could not find the fitting moment. She first drew her chair a little nearer to her mother.

‘Yes, mother, I am happy,’ she murmured.

‘Silly child! As if I didn’t know best. It’s always the same, but *you* had the good sense to trust to my experience.’

Adela slipped from her seat and put her arms about her mother.

‘What is it, dear?’

The reply was whispered. Adela’s embrace grew closer; her face was hidden, and all at once she began to sob.

‘Love me, mother! Love me, dear mother!’

Mrs. Waltham beamed with real tenderness. For half an hour they talked as mother and child alone can. Then Adela walked back to the Manor, still dreaming. She did not feel able to call and see Letty.

There was an afternoon postal delivery at Wanley, and the postman had just left the Manor as Adela returned. Alice, who for a

wonder had been walking in the garden, saw the man going away, and, thinking it possible there might be a letter for her, entered the house to look. Three letters lay on the hall table: two were for Richard, the other was addressed to Mrs. Mutimer. This envelope Alice examined curiously. Whose writing could that be? She certainly knew it; it was a singular hand, stiff, awkward, untrained. Why, it was the writing of Emma's sister Kate, Mrs. Clay. Not a doubt of it. Alice had received a note from Mrs. Clay at the time of Jane Vine's death, and remembered comparing the hand with her own and blessing herself that at all events she wrote with an elegant slope, and not in that hideous upright scrawl. The post-mark? Yes, it was London, E.C. But if Kate addressed a letter to Mrs. Mutimer it must be with sinister design, a design not at all difficult to imagine. Alice had a temptation. To take this letter and either open it herself or give it secretly to her brother? But the servant might somehow make it known that such a letter had arrived.

‘Anything for me, Alice?’

It was Adela's voice. She had approached unheard; Alice was so intent upon her thoughts.

‘Yes, one letter.’

There was no help for it. Alice glanced

at her sister-in-law, and strolled away again into the garden.

Adela examined the envelope. She could not conjecture from whom the letter came; certainly from some illiterate person. Was it for her husband? Was not the 'Mrs.' a mistake for 'Mr.' or perhaps mere ill-writing that deceived the eye? No, the prefix was so very distinct. She opened the envelope where she stood.

'Mrs. Mutimer, I dare say you don't know me nor my name, but I write to you because I think it only right as you should know the truth about your husband, and because me and my sister can't go on any longer as we are. My sister's name is Emma Vine. She was engaged to be married to Richard M. two years before he knew you, and to the last he put her off with make-believe and promises, though it was easy to see what was meant. And when our sister Jane was on her very death-bed, which she died not a week after he married you, and I know well as it was grief as killed her. And now we haven't got enough to eat for Emma and me and my two little children, for I am a widow myself. But that isn't all. Because he found that his friends in Hoxton was crying shame on him, he got it said as Emma had misbehaved herself, which was a

cowardly lie, and all to protect himself. And now Emma is that ill she can't work ; it's come upon her all at once, and what's going to happen God knows. And his own mother cried shame on him, and wouldn't live no longer in the big house in Highbury. He offered us money—I will say so much—but Emma was too proud, and wouldn't hear of it. And then he went giving her a bad name. What do you think of your husband now, Mrs. Mutimer? I don't expect nothing, but it's only right you should know. Emma wouldn't take anything, not if she was dying of starvation, but I've got my children to think of. So that's all I have to say, and I'm glad I've said it.—Yours truly, KATE CLAY.'

Adela remained standing for a few moments when she had finished the letter, then went slowly to her room.

Alice returned from the garden in a short time. In passing through the hall she looked again at the two letters which remained. Neither of them had a sinister appearance ; being addressed to the Manor they probably came from personal friends. She went to the drawing-room and glanced around for Adela, but the room was empty. Richard would not be home for an hour yet ; she took up a novel and tried to pass the time so, but she had a difficulty in fixing her attention. In the end

she once more left the house, and, after a turn or two on the lawn, strolled out of the gate.

She met her brother a hundred yards along the road. The sight of her astonished him.

‘What’s up now, Princess?’ he exclaimed. ‘House on fire? Novels run short?’

‘Something that I expect you won’t care to hear. Who do you think’s been writing to Adela? Someone in London.’

Richard stayed his foot, and looked at his sister with the eyes which suggested disagreeable possibilities.

‘Who do you mean?’ he asked briefly. ‘Not mother?’

The change in him was very sudden. He had been merry and smiling.

‘No; worse than that. She’s got a letter from Kate.’

‘From Kate? Emma’s sister?’ he asked in a low voice of surprise which would have been dismay had he not governed himself.

‘I saw it on the hall table; I remember her writing well enough. Just as I was looking at it Adela came in.’

‘Have you seen her since?’

Alice shook her head. She had this way of saving words. Richard walked on. His first movement of alarm had passed, and now he affected to take the matter with indifference. During the week immediately following his

marriage he had been prepared for this very incident; the possibility had been one of the things he faced with a certain recklessness. But impunity had set his mind at ease, and the news in the first instant struck him with a trepidation which a few minutes' thought greatly allayed. By a mental process familiar enough he at first saw the occurrence as he had seen it in the earlier days of his temptation, when his sense of honour yet gave him frequent trouble; he had to exert himself to recover his present standpoint. At length he smiled.

'Just like that woman,' he said, turning half an eye on Alice.

'If she means trouble, you'll have it,' returned the girl sententiously.

'Well, it's no doubt over by this time.'

'Over? Beginning, I should say,' remarked Alice, swinging her parasol at a butterfly.

They finished their walk to the house in silence, and Richard went at once to his dressing-room. Here he sat down. After all, his mental disquiet was not readily to be dismissed; it even grew as he speculated and viewed likelihoods from all sides. Probably Kate had made a complete disclosure. How would it affect Adela?

You must not suppose that his behaviour in the case of the man Rendal had argued disregard for Adela's opinion of him. Richard

was incapable of understanding how it struck his wife, that was all. If he reflected on the matter, no doubt he was very satisfied with himself, feeling that he had displayed a manly resolution and consistency. But the present difficulty was grave. Whatever Adela might say, there could be no doubt as to her thought; she would henceforth—yes, despise him. That cut his thick skin to the quick; his nature was capable of smarting when thus assailed. For he had by no means lost his early reverence for Adela; nay, in a sense it had increased. His primitive ideas on woman had undergone a change since his marriage. Previously he had considered a wife in the light of property; intellectual or moral independence he could not attribute to her. But he had learnt that Adela was by no means his chattel. He still knew diffidence when he was inclined to throw a joke at her, and could not take her hand without involuntary respect—a sensation which occasionally irritated him. A dim inkling of what was meant by woman's strength and purity had crept into his mind; he knew—in his heart he knew—that he was unworthy to touch her garment. And, to face the whole truth, he all but loved her; that was the meaning of his mingled sentiments with regard to her. A danger of losing her in the material sense would have taught him that better than he as yet knew it;

the fear of losing her respect was not attributable solely to his restless egoism. He had wedded her in quite another frame of mind than that in which he now found himself when he thought of her. He cared much for the high opinion of people in general; Adela's was all but indispensable to him. When he said, 'My wife,' he must have been half-conscious that the word bore a significance different from that he had contemplated. On the lips of those among whom he had grown up the word is desecrated, or for the most part so; it has contemptible, and ridiculous, and vile associations, scarcely ever its true meaning. Formerly he would have laughed at the thought of standing in awe of his wife; nay, he could not have conceived the possibility of such a thing; it would have appeared unnatural, incompatible with the facts of wedded life. Yet he sat here and almost dreaded to enter her presence.

A man of more culture might have thought: A woman cannot in her heart be revolted because another has been cast off for her. Mutimer could not reason so far. It would have been reasoning inapplicable to Adela, but from a certain point of view it might have served as a resource. Richard could only accept his instincts.

But it was useless to postpone the interview; come of it what would, he must have it over

and done with. He could not decide how to speak until he knew what the contents of Kate's letter were. He was nervously anxious to know.

Adela sat in her boudoir, with a book open on her lap. After the first glance on his entering she kept her eyes down. He sauntered up and stood before her in an easy attitude.

'Who has been writing to you from London?' he at once asked, abruptly in consequence of the effort to speak without constraint.

Adela was not prepared for such a question. She remembered all at once that Alice had seen the letter as it lay on the table. Why had Alice spoken to her brother about it? There could be only one explanation of that, and of his coming thus directly. She raised her eyes for a moment, and a slight shock seemed to affect her.

She was unconscious how long she delayed her reply.

'Can't you tell me?' Richard said, with more roughness than he intended. He was suffering, and suffering affected his temper.

Adela drew the letter from her pocket and in silence handed it to him. He read it quickly, and, before the end was reached, had promptly chosen his course.

'What do you think of this?' was his question, as he folded the letter and rolled it in his

hand. He was smiling, and enjoyed complete self-command.

‘I cannot think,’ fell from Adela’s lips. ‘I am waiting for your words.’

He noticed at length, now he was able to inspect her calmly, that she looked faint, pain-stricken.

‘Alice told me who had written to you,’ Richard pursued, in his frankest tones. ‘It was well she saw the letter; you might have said nothing.’

‘That would have been very unjust to you,’ said Adela in a low regular voice. ‘I could only have done that if—if I had believed it.’

‘You don’t altogether believe it then?’

She looked at him with full eyes and made answer:

‘You are my husband.’

It echoed in his ears; not to many men does it fall to hear those words so spoken. Another would have flung himself at her feet and prayed to her. Mutimer only felt a vast relief, mingled with gratitude. The man all but flattered himself that she had done him justice.

‘Well, you are quite right,’ he spoke. ‘It isn’t true, and if you knew this woman you would understand the whole affair. I dare say you can gather a good deal from the way she writes. It’s true enough that I was engaged to her sister, but it was broken off before I knew

you, and for the reasons she says here. I'm not going to talk to you about things of that kind ; I dare say you wouldn't care to hear them. Of course she says I made it all up. Do you think I'm the kind of man to do that?'

Perhaps she did not know that she was gazing at him. The question interrupted her in a train of thought which was going on in her mind even while she listened. She was asking herself why, when they were in London, he had objected to a meeting between her and his mother. He had said his mother was a crotchety old woman who could not make up her mind to the changed circumstances, and was intensely prejudiced against women above her own class. Was that a very convincing description? She had accepted it at the time, but now, after reading this letter——? But could any man speak with that voice and that look, and lie? Her agitation grew intolerable. Answer she must ; could she, could she say 'No' with truth? Answer she must, for he waited. In the agony of striving for voice there came upon her once more that dizziness of the morning, but in a more severe form. She struggled, felt her breath failing, tried to rise, and fell back unconscious.

At the same time Alice was sitting in the drawing-room, in conversation with Mr. Willis Rodman. 'Arry having been invited for this

evening, Rodman was asked with him, as had been the case before. 'Arry was at present amusing himself in the stables, exchanging sentiments with the groom. Rodman sat near Alice, or rather he knelt upon a chair, so that at any moment he could assume a standing attitude before her. He talked in a low voice.

'You'll come out to-night?'

'No, not to-night. You must speak to him to-night.'

Rodman mused.

'Why shouldn't you?' resumed the girl eagerly, in a tone as unlike that she used to Mr. Keene as well could be. She was in earnest; her eyes never moved from her companion's face; her lips trembled. 'Why should you put it off? I can't see why we keep it a secret. Dick can't have a word to say against it; you know he can't. Tell him to-night after dinner. Do! do!'

Rodman frowned in thought.

'He won't like it.'

'But why not? I believe he will. He will, he shall, he must! I'm not to depend on him, surely?'

'A day or two more, Alice.'

'I can't keep up the shamming!' she exclaimed. 'Adela suspects, I feel sure. Whenever you come in I feel that hot and red.' She laughed and blushed. 'If you won't

do as I tell you, I'll give you up, I will indeed!'

Rodman stroked his moustache, smiling.

'You will, will you?'

'See if I don't. To-night! It must be to-night! Shall I call you a pretty name? It's only because I couldn't bear to be found out before you tell him.'

He still stroked his moustache. His handsome face was half amused, half troubled. At last he said:

'Very well; to-night.'

Shortly after, Mutimer came into the room.

'Adela isn't up to the mark,' he said to Alice. 'She'd better have dinner by herself, I think; but she'll join us afterwards.'

Brother and sister exchanged looks.

'Oh, it's only a headache or something of the kind,' he continued. 'It'll be all right soon.'

And he began to talk with Rodman cheerfully, so that Alice felt it must really be all right. She drew aside and looked into a novel.

Adela did appear after dinner, very pale and silent, but with a smile on her face. There had been no further conversation between her and her husband. She talked a little with 'Arry, in her usual gentle way, then asked to be allowed to say good-night. 'Arry at the

same time took his leave, having been privately bidden to do so by his sister. He was glad enough to get away ; in the drawing-room his limbs soon began to ache, from inability to sit at his ease.

Then Alice withdrew, and the men were left alone.

Adela did not go to bed. She suffered from the closeness of the evening and sat by her open windows, trying to read a chapter in the New Testament. About eleven o'clock she had a great desire to walk upon the garden grass for a few minutes before undressing ; perhaps it might help her to the sleep she so longed for yet feared she would not obtain. The desire became so strong that she yielded to it, passed quietly downstairs, and out into the still night. She directed her steps to her favourite remote corner. There was but little moonlight, and scarcely a star was visible. When she neared the laburnums behind which she often sat or walked, her ear caught the sound of voices. They came nearer, on the other side of the trees. The first word which she heard distinctly bound her to the spot and forced her to listen.

‘No, I shan’t put it off.’ It was Alice speaking. ‘I know what comes of that kind of thing. I’m old enough to be my own mistress.’

‘You are not twenty-one,’ replied Richard in an annoyed voice. ‘I shall do everything I can to put it off till you are of age. Rodman is a good enough fellow in his place; but it isn’t hard to see why he’s talked you over in this way.’

‘He hasn’t talked me over!’ cried Alice passionately. ‘I needn’t have listened if I hadn’t liked.’

‘You’re a foolish girl, and you want someone to look after you. If you’ll only wait you can make a good marriage. This would be a bad one, in every sense.’

‘I shall marry him.’

‘And I shall prevent it. It’s for your own sake, Alice.’

‘If you try to prevent it—I’ll tell Adela everything about Emma! I’ll tell her the whole plain truth, and I’ll prove it to her. So hinder me if you dare!’

Alice hastened away.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the month of September Mr. Wyvern was called upon to unite in holy matrimony two pairs in whom we are interested. Alice Mutimer became Mrs. Willis Rodman, and Alfred Waltham took home a bride who suited him exactly, seeing that she was never so happy as when submitting herself to a stronger will. Alfred and Letty ran away and hid themselves in South Wales. Mr. and Mrs. Rodman fled to the Continent.

Half Alice's fortune was settled upon herself, her brother and Alfred Waltham being trustees. This was all Mutimer could do. He disliked the marriage intensely, and not only because he had set his heart on a far better match for Alice; he had no real confidence in Rodman. Though the latter's extreme usefulness and personal tact had from the first led Richard to admit him to terms of intimacy, time did not favour the friendship. Mutimer, growing daily more ambitious and more puncti-

lions in his intercourse with all whom, notwithstanding his principles, he deemed inferiors from the social point of view, often regretted keenly that he had allowed any relation between himself and Rodman more than that of master and man. Experience taught him how easily he might have made the most of Rodman without granting him a single favour. The first suggestion of the marriage enraged him; in the conversation with Rodman, which took place, moreover, at an unfavourable moment, he lost his temper and flung out very broad hints indeed as to the suitor's motives. Rodman was calm; life had instructed him in the advantages of a curbed tongue; but there was heightened colour on his face, and his demeanour much resembled that of a proud man who cares little to justify himself, but will assuredly never forget an insult. It was one of the peculiarities of this gentleman that his exterior was most impressive when the inner man was most busy with ignoble or venomous thoughts.

But for Alice's sake Mutimer could not persist in his hostility. Alice had a weapon which he durst not defy, and, the marriage being inevitable, he strove hard to see it in a more agreeable light, even tried to convince himself that his prejudice against Rodman was groundless. He loved his sister, and for her

alone would put up with things otherwise intolerable. It was a new exasperation when he discovered that Rodman could not be persuaded to continue his work at New Wanley. All inducements proved vain. Richard had hoped that at least one advantage might come of the marriage, that Rodman would devote capital to the works; but Rodman's Socialism cooled strangely from the day when his ends were secured. He purposed living in London, and Alice was delighted to encourage him. The girl had visions of a life such as the heroines of certain novels rejoice in. For a wonder, her husband was indispensable to the brightness of that future. Rodman had inspired her with an infatuation. Their relations once declared, she grudged him every moment he spent away from her. It was strangely like true passion, the difference only marked by an extravagant selfishness. She thought of no one, cared for no one, but herself, Rodman having become part of that self. With him she was imperiously slavish; her tenderness was a kind of greed; she did not pretend to forgive her brother for his threatened opposition, and, having got hold of the idea that Adela took part against Rodman, she hated her and would not be alone in her company for a moment. On her marriage day she refused Adela's offered kiss and did her best to

let everyone see how delighted she was to leave them behind.

The autumn was a time of physical suffering for Adela. Formerly she had sought to escape her mother's attentions, now she accepted them with thankfulness. Mrs. Waltham had grave fears for her daughter; doctors suspected some organic disease, one summoned from London going so far as to hint at a weakness of the chest. Early in November it was decided to go south for the winter, and Exmouth was chosen, chiefly because Mrs. Westlake was spending a month there. Mr. Westlake, whose interest in Adela had grown with each visit he paid to the Manor, himself suggested the plan. Mrs. Waltham and Adela left Wanley together; Mutimer promised visits as often as he could manage to get away. Since Rodman's departure Richard found himself overwhelmed with work. None the less he resolutely pursued the idea of canvassing Belwick at the coming general election. Opposition, from whomsoever it came, aggravated him. He was more than ever troubled about the prospects of New Wanley; there even loomed before his mind a possible abandonment of the undertaking. He had never contemplated the sacrifice of his fortune, and though anything of that kind was still very far off, it was daily more difficult for him to face with equanimity even moderate

losses. Money had fostered ambition, and ambition full grown had more need than ever of its nurse. New Wanley was no longer an end in itself, but a stepping-stone. You must come to your own conclusions in judging the value of Mutimer's social zeal; the facts of his life up to this time are before you, and you will not forget how complex a matter is the mind of a strong man with whom circumstances have dealt so strangely. His was assuredly not the vulgar self-seeking of the gilded *bourgeois* who covets an after-dinner sleep on Parliamentary benches. His ignorance of the machinery of government was profound; though he spoke scornfully of Parliament and its members, he had no conception of those powers of dulness and respectability which seize upon the best men if folly lures them within the precincts of St. Stephen's. He thought, poor fellow! that he could rise in his place and thunder forth his indignant eloquence as he did in Commonwealth Hall and elsewhere; he imagined a conscience-stricken House, he dreamed of passionate debates on a Bill which really had the good of the people for its sole object. Such Bill would of course bear *his* name; shall we condemn him for that?

Adela was at Exmouth, drinking the mild air, wondering whether there was in truth a life to come, and, if so, whether it was a life wherein

Love and Duty were at one. A year ago such thoughts could not have entered her mind. But she had spent several weeks in close companionship with Stella Westlake, and Stella's influence was subtle. Mrs. Westlake had come here to regain strength after a confinement; the fact drew her near to Adela, whose time for giving birth to a child was not far off.

Adela at first regarded this friend with much the same feeling of awe as mingled with Letty's affection for Adela herself. Stella Westlake was not only possessed of intellectual riches which Adela had had no opportunity of gaining; her character was so full of imaginative force, of dreamy splendours, that it addressed itself to a mind like Adela's with magic irresistible and permanent. No rules of the polite world applied to Stella; she spoke and acted with an independence so spontaneous that it did not suggest conscious opposition to the received ways of thought to which ordinary women are confined, but rather a complete ignorance of them. Adela felt herself startled, but never shocked, even when the originality went most counter to her own prejudices; it was as though she had drunk a draught of most unexpected flavour, the effect of which was to set her nerves delightfully trembling, and make her long to taste it again. It was not an occasional effect, the result of an effort on Stella's part to surprise

or charm; the commonest words had novel meanings when uttered in her voice; a profound sincerity seemed to inspire every lightest question or remark. Her presence was agitating; she had but to enter the room and sit in silence, and Adela forthwith was raised from the depression of her broodings to a vividness of being, an imaginative energy, such as she had never known. Adela doubted for some time whether Stella regarded her with affection; the little demonstrations in which women are wont to indulge were incompatible with that grave dreaminess, and Stella seemed to avoid even the common phrases of friendship. But one day, when Adela had not been well enough to rise, and as she lay on the borderland of sleeping and waking, she half dreamt, half knew, that a face bent over her, and that lips were pressed against her own; and such a thrill struck through her that, though now fully conscious, she had not power to stir, but lay as in the moment of some rapturous death. For when the presence entered into her dream, when the warmth melted upon her lips, she imagined it the kiss which might once have come to her but now was lost for ever. It was pain to open her eyes, but when she did so, and met Stella's silent gaze, she knew that love was offered her, a love of which it was needless to speak.

Mrs. Waltham was rather afraid of Stella ; privately she doubted whether the poor thing was altogether in her perfect mind. When the visitor came the mother generally found occupation or amusement elsewhere, conversation with Stella was so extremely difficult. Mr. Westlake was also at Exmouth, but much engaged in literary work. There was, too, an artist and his family, with whom the Westlakes were acquainted, their name Boscobel. Mrs. Boscobel was a woman of the world, five-and-thirty, charming, intelligent ; she read little, but was full of interest in literary and artistic matters, and talked as only a woman can who has long associated with men of brains. To her Adela was interesting, personally and still more as an illustration of a social experiment.

‘How young she is!’ was her remark to Mr. Westlake shortly after making Adela’s acquaintance. ‘It will amuse you, the thought I had ; I really must tell it you. She realises my idea of a virgin mother. Haven’t you felt anything of the kind?’

Mr. Westlake smiled.

‘Yes, I understand. Stella said something evidently traceable to the same impression ; her voice, she said, is full of forgiveness.’

‘Excellent ! And has she much to forgive, do you think?’

‘I hope not.’

‘ Yet she is not exactly happy, I imagine ? ’

Mr. Westlake did not care to discuss the subject. The lady had recourse to Stella for some account of Mr. Mutimer.

‘ He is a strong man,’ Stella said in a tone which betrayed the Socialist’s enthusiasm. ‘ He stands for earth-subduing energy. I imagine him at a forge, beating fire out of iron.’

‘ H’m ! That’s not quite the same thing as imagining him that beautiful child’s husband. No education, I suppose ? ’

‘ Sufficient. With more, he would no longer fill the place he does. He can speak eloquently ; he is the true voice of the millions who cannot speak their own thoughts. If he were more intellectual he would become commonplace ; I hope he will never see further than he does now. Isn’t a perfect type more precious than a man who is neither one thing nor another ? ’

‘ Artistically speaking, by all means.’

‘ In his case I don’t mean it artistically. He is doing a great work.’

‘ A friend of mine—you don’t know Hubert Eldon, I think ?—tells me he has ruined one of the loveliest valleys in England.’

‘ Yes, I dare say he has done that. It is an essential part of his protest against social wrong. The earth renews itself, but a dead man or woman who has lived without joy can never be recompensed.’

‘She, of course, is strongly of the same opinion?’

‘Adela is a Socialist.’

Mrs. Boscobel laughed rather satirically.

‘I doubt it!’

Stella, when she went to sit with Adela, either at home or by the sea-shore, often carried a book in her hand, and at Adela’s request she read aloud. In this way Adela first came to know what was meant by literature, as distinguished from works of learning. The verse of Shelley and the prose of Landor fell upon her ears; it was as though she had hitherto lived in deafness. Sometimes she had to beg the reader to pause for that day; her heart and mind seemed overfull; she could not even speak of these new things, but felt the need of lying back in twilight to marvel and repeat melodies.

Mrs. Boscobel happened to approach them once whilst this reading was going on.

‘You are educating her?’ she said to Stella afterwards.

‘Perhaps—a little,’ Stella replied absently.

‘Isn’t it just a trifle dangerous?’ suggested the understanding lady.

‘Dangerous? How?’

‘The wife of the man who makes sparks fly out of iron? The man who is on no account to learn anything?’

Stella shook her head, saying, 'You don't know her.'

'I should much like to,' was Mrs. Boscobel's smiling rejoinder.

In Stella's company it did not seem very likely that Adela would lose her social enthusiasm, yet danger there was, and that precisely on account of Mrs. Westlake's idealist tendencies. When she spoke of the toiling multitude, she saw them in a kind of exalted vision; she beheld them glorious in their woe, ennobled by the tyranny under which they groaned. She had seen little if anything of the representative proletarian, and perchance even if she had the momentary impression would have faded in the light of her burning soul. Now Adela was in the very best position for understanding those faults of the working class which are ineradicable in any one generation. She knew her husband, knew him better than ever now that she regarded him from a distance; she knew 'Arry Mutimer; and now she was getting to appreciate with a thoroughness impossible hitherto, the monstrous gulf between men of that kind and cultured human beings. She had, too, studied the children and the women of New Wanley, and the results of such study were arranging themselves in her mind. All unconsciously, Stella Westlake was cooling Adela's zeal with every fervid word she uttered; Adela

at times with difficulty restrained herself from crying, 'But it is a mistake! They have not these feelings you attribute to them. Such suffering as you picture them enduring comes only of the poetry-fed soul at issue with fate.' She could not as yet have so expressed herself, but the knowledge was growing within her. For Adela was not by nature a social enthusiast. When her heart leapt at Stella's chant, it was not in truth through contagion of sympathy, but in admiration and love of the noble woman who could thus think and speak. Adela—and who will not be thankful for it?—was, before all things, feminine; her true enthusiasms were personal. It was a necessity of her nature to love a human being, this or that one, not a crowd. She had been starving, killing the self which was her value. This home on the Devon coast received her like an earthly paradise; looking back on New Wanley, she saw it murky and lurid; it was hard to believe that the sun ever shone there. But for the most part, she tried to keep it altogether from her mind, tried to dissociate her husband from his public tasks, and to remember him as the man with whom her life was irrevocably bound up. When delight in Stella's poetry was followed by fear, she strengthened herself by thought of the child she bore beneath her heart; for that child's sake she would accept the beau-

tiful things offered to her, some day to bring them as rich gifts to the young life. Her own lot was fixed; she might not muse upon it, she durst not consider it too deeply. There were things in the past which she had determined, if by any means it were possible, utterly to forget. For the future, there was her child.

Mutimer came to Exmouth when she had been there three weeks, and he stayed four days. Mrs. Boscobel had an opportunity of making his acquaintance.

‘Who contrived that marriage?’ she asked of Mr. Westlake subsequently. ‘Our lady mother, presumably.’

‘I have no reason to think it was not well done,’ replied Mr. Westlake with reserve.

‘Most skilfully done, no doubt,’ rejoined the lady.

But at the end of the year, the Westlakes returned to London, the Boscobels shortly after. Mrs. Waltham and her daughter had made no other close connections, and Adela’s health alone allowed of her leaving the house for a short drive on sunny days. At the end of February the child was born prematurely; it entered the world only to leave it again. For a week they believed that Adela would die. Scarcely was she pronounced out of danger by the end of March. But after that she recovered strength.

May saw her at Wanley once more. She had become impatient to return. The Parliamentary elections were very near at hand, and Mutimer almost lived in Belwick; it seemed to Adela that duty required her to be near him, as well as to supply his absence from New Wanley as much as was possible. She was still only the ghost of her former self, but disease no longer threatened her, and activity alone could completely restore her health. She was anxious to recommence her studies, to resume her readings to the children; and she desired to see Mr. Wyvern. She understood by this time why he had chosen Andersen's Tales for her readings; of many other things which he had said, causing her doubt, the meaning was now clear enough to her. She had so much to talk of with the vicar, so many questions to put to him, not a few of a kind that would—she thought—surprise and trouble him. None the less, they must be asked and answered. Part of her desire to see him again was merely the result of her longing for the society of well-read and thoughtful people. She knew that he would appear to her in a different light from formerly; she would be far better able to understand him.

She began by seeking his opinion of her husband's chances in Belwick. Mr. Wyvern shook his head and said frankly that he thought

there was no chance at all. Mutimer was looked upon in the borough as a mischievous interloper, who came to make disunion in the Radical party. The son of a lord and an iron-master of great influence were the serious candidates. Had he seen fit, Mr. Wyvern could have mentioned not a few lively incidents in the course of the political warfare; such, for instance, as the appearance of a neat little pamphlet which purported to give a full and complete account of Mutimer's life. In this pamphlet nothing untrue was set down, nor did it contain anything likely to render its publisher amenable to the law of libel; but the writer, a gentleman closely connected with Comrade Roodhouse, most skilfully managed to convey the worst possible impression throughout. Nor did the vicar hesitate to express his regret that Mutimer should be seeking election at all. Adela felt with him.

She found Richard in a strange state of chronic excitement. On whatever subject he spoke it was with the same nervous irritation, and the slightest annoyance set him fuming. To her he paid very little attention, and for the most part seemed disinclined to converse with her; Adela found it necessary to keep silence on political matters; once or twice he replied to her questions with a rough impatience which kept her miserable throughout the day,

so much had it revealed of the working man. As the election day approached she suffered from a sinking of the heart, almost a bodily fear; a fear the same in kind as that of the wretched woman who anticipates the return of a brute-husband late on Saturday night. The same in kind; no reasoning would overcome it. She worked hard all day long, that at night she might fall on deep sleep. Again she had taken up her hard German books, and was also busy with French histories of revolution, which did indeed fascinate her, though, as she half perceived, solely by the dramatic quality of the stories they told. And at length the morning of her fear had come.

When he left home Mutimer bade her not expect him till the following day. She spent the hours in loneliness and misery. Mr. Wyvern called, but even him she begged through a servant to excuse her; her mother likewise came, and her she talked with for a few minutes, then pleaded headache. At nine o'clock in the evening she went to her bedroom. She had a soporific at hand, remaining from the time of her illness, and in dread of a sleepless night she had recourse to it.

It seemed to her that she had slept a very long time when a great and persistent noise awoke her. It was someone knocking at her door, even, as she at length became aware,

turning the handle and shaking it. Being alone, she had locked herself in. She sprang from bed, put on her dressing-gown, and went to the door. Then came her husband's voice, impatiently calling her name. She admitted him.

Through the white blind the morning twilight just made objects visible in the room; Adela afterwards remembered noticing the drowsy pipe of a bird near the window. Mutimer came in, and, without closing the door, began to demand angrily why she had locked him out. Only now she quite shook off her sleep, and could perceive that there was something unusual in his manner. He smelt strongly of tobacco, and, as she fancied, of spirits; but it was his staggering as he moved to draw up the blind that made her aware of his condition. She found afterwards that he had driven all the way from Belwick, and the marvel was that he had accomplished such a feat; probably his horse deserved most of the credit. When he had pulled the blind up, he turned, propped himself against the dressing-table, and gazed at her with terribly lacklustre eyes. Then she saw the expression of his face change; there came upon it a smile such as she had never seen or imagined, a hideous smile that made her blood cold. Without speaking, he threw himself forward and came towards her. For an instant she was

powerless, paralysed with terror; but happily she found utterance for a cry, and that released her limbs. Before he could reach her, she had darted out of the room, and fled to another chamber, that which Alice had formerly occupied, where she locked herself against him. To her surprise he did not discover her retreat; she heard him moving about the passages, stumbling here and there, then he seemed to return to his bedroom. She wrapped herself in a counterpane, and sat in a chair till it was full morning.

He was absent for a week after that. Of course his polling at the election had been ridiculously small compared with that of the other candidates. When he returned he went about his ordinary occupations; he was seemingly not in his usual health, but the constant irritableness had left him. Adela tried to bear herself as though nothing unwonted had come to pass, but Mutimer scarcely spoke when at home; if he addressed her it was in a quick, off-hand way, and without looking at her. Adela again lived almost alone. Her mother and Letty understood that she preferred this. Letty had many occupations; before long she hoped to welcome her first child. The children of New Wanley still came once a week to the Manor; Adela endeavoured to amuse them, to make them thoughtful, but it had become a hard,

hard task. Only with Mr. Wyvern did she occasionally speak without constraint, though not of course without reserve; speech of *that* kind she feared would never again be possible to her. Still she felt that the vicar saw far into her life. On some topics she was more open than she had hitherto ventured to be; a boldness, almost a carelessness, for which she herself could not account, possessed her at such times.

Late in June she received from Stella Westlake a pressing invitation to come and spend a fortnight in London. It was like sunshine to her heart; almost without hesitation she resolved to accept it. Her husband offered no objection, seemed to treat the proposal with indifference. Later in the day he said:

‘If you have time, you might perhaps give Alice a call.’

‘I shall do that as soon as ever I can.’

He had something else to say.

‘Perhaps Mrs. Westlake might ask her to come, whilst you are there.’

‘Very likely, I think,’ Adela replied, with an attempt at confidence.

It was only her second visit to London: the first had been in winter time, and under conditions which had not allowed her to attend to anything she saw. But for Stella’s presence there she would have feared London; her

memory of it was like that of an ill dream long past; her mind only reverted to it in darkest hours, and then she shuddered. But now she thought only of Stella; Stella was light and joy, a fountain of magic waters. Her arrival at the house in Avenue Road was one of the most blissful moments she had ever known. The servant led her upstairs to a small room, where the veiled sun made warmth on rich hangings, on beautiful furniture, on books and pictures, on ferns and flowers. The goddess of this sanctuary was alone; as the door opened the notes of a zither trembled into silence, and Adela saw a light robed loveliness rise and stand before her. Stella took both her hands very gently, then looked into her face with eyes which seemed to be new from some high vision, then drew her within the paradise of an embrace. The kiss was once more like that first touch of lips which had come to Adela on the verge of sleep; she quivered through her frame.

Mr. Westlake shortly joined them, and spoke with an extreme kindness which completed Adela's sense of being at home. No one disturbed them through the evening; Adela went to bed early and slept without a dream.

Stella and her husband talked of her in the night. Mr. Westlake had, at the time of the

election, heard for the first time the story of Mutimer and the obscure work-girl in Hoxton, and had taken some trouble to investigate it. It had not reached his ears when the Hoxton Socialists made it a subject of public discussion; Comrade Roodhouse had inserted only a very general report of the proceedings in his paper the *Tocsin*, and even this Mr. Westlake had not seen. But a copy of the pamphlet which circulated in Belwick came into his hands, and when he began to talk on the subject with an intimate friend, who, without being a Socialist, amused himself with following the movement closely, he heard more than he liked. To Stella he said nothing of all this. His own ultimate judgment was that you cannot expect men to be perfect, and that great causes have often been served by very indifferent characters.

‘She looks shockingly ill,’ he began to-night when alone with Stella. ‘Wasn’t there something said about consumption when she was at Exmouth? Has she any cough?’

‘No, I don’t think it is that,’ Stella answered.

‘She seems glad to be with you.’

‘Very glad, I think.’

‘Did the loss of her child affect her deeply?’

‘I cannot say. She has never spoken of it.’

‘Poor child!’

Stella made no reply to the exclamation.

The next day Adela went to call on Mrs. Rodman. It was a house in Bayswater, not large, but richly furnished. Adela chose a morning hour, hoping to find her sister-in-law alone, but in this she was disappointed. Four visitors were in the drawing-room, three ladies and a man of horsey appearance, who talked loudly as he leaned back with his legs crossed, a walking-stick held over his knee, his hat on the ground before him. The ladies were all apparently middle-aged; one of them had a great quantity of astonishingly yellow hair, and the others made up for deficiency in that respect with toilets in very striking taste. The subject under discussion was a recent murder. The gentleman had the happiness of being personally acquainted with the murderer, at all events had frequently met him at certain resorts of the male population. When Mrs. Rodman had briefly welcomed Adela, the discussion continued. Its tone was vulgar, but perhaps not more so than the average tone among middle-class people who are on familiar terms with each other. The gentleman, still leading the conversation, kept his eyes fixed on Adela, greatly to her discomfort.

In less than half an hour these four took their departure.

‘So Dick came a cropper!’ was Alice’s first remark, when alone with her sister-in-law.

Adela tried in vain to understand.

‘At the election, you know. I don’t see what he wanted to go making himself so ridiculous. Is he much cut up?’

‘I don’t think it troubles him much,’ Adela said; ‘he really had no expectation of being elected. It was just to draw attention to Socialism.’

‘Of course he’ll put it in that way. But I’d no idea you were in London. Where are you living?’

Alice had suffered, had suffered distinctly, in her manners, and probably in her character. It was not only that she affected a fastness of tone, and betrayed an ill-bred pleasure in receiving Adela in her fine drawing-room; her face no longer expressed the idle good-nature which used to make it pleasant to contemplate, it was thinner, less wholesome in colour, rather acid about the lips. Her manner was hurried, she seemed to be living in a whirl of frivolous excitements. Her taste in dress had deteriorated; she wore a lot of jewellery of a common kind, and her headgear was fantastic.

‘We have a few friends to-morrow night,’ she said when the conversation had with difficulty dragged itself over ten minutes. ‘Will

you come to dinner? I'm sure Willis will be very glad to see you.'

Adela heard the invitation with distress. Fortunately it was given in a way which all but presupposed refusal.

'I am afraid I cannot,' she answered. 'My health is not good; I never see people. Thank you very much.'

'Oh, of course I wouldn't put you out,' said Alice, inspecting her relative's face curiously. And she added, rather more in her old voice, 'I'm sorry you lost your baby. I believe you're fond of children? I don't care anything about them myself; I hope I shan't have any.'

Adela could not make any reply; she shook hands with Alice and took her leave, only breathing freely when once more in the street. All the way back to St. John's Wood she was afflicted by the thought that it would be impossible to advise a meeting between Stella and Mrs. Rodman. Yet she had promised Richard to do so. Once more she found herself sundered from him in sympathies. Affection between Alice and her there could be none, yet Alice was the one person in the world whom Richard held greatly dear.

The enchanted life of those first weeks at Exmouth was now resumed. The golden mornings passed with poetry and music; in the afternoon visits were paid to museums and

galleries, or to the studios of artists who were Mrs. Westlake's friends, and who, as Adela was pleased to see, always received Stella with reverential homage. The evening, save when a concert called them forth, was generally a time of peaceful reading and talking, the presence of friends making no difference in the simple arrangements of the home. If a man came to dine at this house, it was greatly preferred that he should not present himself in the costume of a waiter, and only those came who were sufficiently intimate with the Westlakes to know their habits. One evening weekly saw a purely Socialist gathering; three or four artisans were always among the guests. On that occasion Adela was sorely tempted to plead a headache, but for several reasons she resisted. It was a trial to her, for she was naturally expected to talk a good deal with the visitors, several of whom she herself had entertained at Wanley. Watching Stella, she had a feeling which she could not quite explain or justify; she was pained to see her goddess in this company, and felt indignant with some of the men who seemed to make themselves too much at their ease. There was no talk of poetry.

Among the studios to which Stella took her was that of Mr. Boscobel. Mrs. Boscobel made much of them and insisted on Adela's coming to dine with her. An evening was appointed.

Adela felt reproofs of conscience, remembering the excuse she had offered to Alice, but in this case it was impossible to decline. Stella assured her that the party would be small, and would be sure to comprise none but really interesting people. It was so, in fact. Two men whom, on arriving, they found in the drawing-room Adela knew by fame, and the next to enter was a lady whose singing she had heard with rapture at a concert on the evening before. She was talking with this lady when a new announcement fell upon her ear, a name which caused her to start and gaze towards the door. Impossible for her to guard against this display of emotion; the name she heard so distinctly seemed an unreal utterance, a fancy of her brain, or else it belonged to another than the one she knew. But there was no such illusion; he whom she saw enter was assuredly Hubert Eldon.

A few hot seconds only seemed to intervene before she was called upon to acknowledge him, for Mrs. Boscobel was presenting him to her.

‘I have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Mutimer before,’ Hubert said as soon as he saw that Adela in voice and look recognised their acquaintance.

Mrs. Boscobel was evidently surprised. She herself had met Hubert at the house of an

artist in Rome more than a year ago, but the details of his life were unknown to her. Subsequently, in London, she happened once to get on the subject of Socialism with him, and told him, as an interesting story, what she heard from the Westlakes about Richard Mutimer. Hubert admitted knowledge of the facts, and made the remark about the valley of Wanley which Mrs. Boscobel repeated at Exmouth, but he revealed nothing more. Having no marriageable daughter, Mrs. Boscobel was under no necessity of searching into his antecedents. He was one of ten or a dozen young men of possible future whom she liked to have about her.

Hubert seated himself by Adela, and there was a moment of inevitable silence.

‘I saw you as soon as I got into the room,’ he said, in the desperate necessity for speech of some kind. ‘I thought I must have been mistaken; I was so unprepared to meet you here.’

Adela replied that she was staying with Mrs. Westlake.

‘I don’t know her,’ said Hubert, ‘and am very anxious to. Boscobel’s portrait of her—I saw it in the studio just before it went away—was a wonderful thing.’

This was necessarily said in a low tone; it seemed to establish confidence between them.

Adela experienced a sudden and strange calm ; in a world so entirely new to her, was it not to be expected that things would happen of which she had never dreamt? The tremor with which she had faced this her first evening in general society had allayed itself almost as soon as she entered the room, giving place to a kind of pleasure for which she was not at all prepared, a pleasure inconsistent with the mood which governed her life. Perhaps, had she been brought into this world in those sunny days before her marriage, just such pleasure as this, only in a more pronounced degree, would have awoke in her and have been fearlessly indulged. The first shock of the meeting with Hubert having passed, she was surprised at her self-control, at the ease with which she found she could converse. Hubert took her down to dinner ; on the stairs he twice turned to look at her face, yet she felt sure that her hand had betrayed no agitation as it lay on his arm. At table he talked freely ; did he know—she asked herself—that this would relieve her? And his conversation was altogether unlike what it had been two years and a half ago—so long it was since she had talked with him under ordinary conditions. There was still animation, and the note of intellectual impatience was touched occasionally, but the world had ripened him, his judgments were

based on sounder knowledge, he was more polished, more considerate—‘gentler,’ Adela afterwards said to herself. And decidedly he had gained in personal appearance; a good deal of the bright, eager boy had remained with him in his days of storm and stress, but now his features had the repose of maturity and their refinement had fixed itself in lines of strength.

He talked solely of the present, discussed with her the season’s pictures, the books, the idle business of the town. At length she found herself able to meet his glance without fear, even to try and read its character. She thought of the day when her mother told her of his wickedness. Since then she had made acquaintance with wickedness in various forms, and now she marvelled at the way in which she had regarded him. ‘I was a child, a child,’ she repeated to herself. Thinking thus, she lost no one of his words. He spoke of the things which interested her most deeply; how much he could teach her, were such teaching possible!

At last she ventured upon a personal question.

‘How is Mrs. Eldon?’

She thought he looked at her gratefully; certainly there was a deep kindness in his eyes, a look which was one of the new things she noted in him.

‘Very much as when you knew her,’ he replied. ‘Weaker, I fear. I have just spent a few days at Agworth.’

Doubtless he had often been at Agworth ; perchance he was there, so close by, in some of the worst hours of her misery.

When the ladies withdrew Mrs. Boscobel seated herself by Adela for a moment.

‘So you really knew Mr. Eldon?’

‘Yes, but it is some time since I saw him,’ Adela replied simply, smiling in the joy of being so entirely mistress of herself.

‘You were talking pictures, I heard. You can trust him there ; his criticism is admirable. You know he did the Grosvenor for the——?’

She mentioned a weekly paper.

‘There are so many things I don’t know,’ Adela replied laughingly, ‘and that is one of them.’

Hubert shortly after had his wish in being presented to Mrs. Westlake. Adela observed them as they talked together. Gladness she could hardly bear possessed her when she saw on Stella’s face the expression of interest which not everyone could call forth. She did not ask why she was so glad ; for this one evening it might be allowed her to rest and forget and enjoy.

There was singing, and the sweetest of the songs went home with her and lived in her

heart all through a night which was too voiceful for sleep. Might she think of him henceforth as a friend? Would she meet him again before her return to—to the darkness of that ravaged valley? Her mood was a strange one; conscience gave her no trouble, appeared suspended. And why should conscience have interfered with her? Her happiness was as apart from past and future as if by some magic she had been granted an intermezzo of life wholly distinct from her real one. These people with whom she found living so pleasant did not really enter her existence; it was as though she played parts to give her pleasure; she merely looked on for the permitted hour.

But Stella was real, real as that glorious star whose name she knew not, the brightest she could see from her chamber window. To Stella her soul clung with passion and worship. Stella's kiss had power to make her all but faint with ecstasy; it was the kiss which woke her from her dream, the kiss which would for ever be to her a terror and a mystery.

CHAPTER X.

HER waking after a short morning sleep was dark and troubled. The taste of last night's happiness was like ashes on her tongue; fearing to face the daylight, she lay with lids heavily closed on a brain which ached in its endeavour to resume the sensations of a few hours ago. The images of those with whom she had talked so cheerfully either eluded her memory, or flitted before her unexpectedly, mopping and mowing, so that her heart was revolted. It is in wakings such as these that Time finds his opportunity to harry youth; every such unwinds from about us one of the veils of illusion, bringing our eyes so much nearer to the horrid truth of things. Adela shrank from the need of rising; she would have abandoned herself to voiceless desolation, have lain still and dark whilst the current of misery swept over her, deeper and deeper. When she viewed her face, its ring-eyed pallor fascinated her with incredulity. Had she looked at all like that

whilst Hubert Eldon and the others were talking to her? What did they secretly think of her? The others might attribute to her many more years than she had really seen; but Hubert knew her age. Perhaps that was why he glanced at her twice or thrice on the stairs.

For the first time she wished not to be alone with Stella, fearing lest the conversation should turn on Hubert. Yet, when they had sat together for nearly an hour, and Stella had not named him, she began to suffer from a besieging desire to speak of him, a recurrent impulse to allude to him, however distantly, so that her companion might be led to the subject. The impulse grew to a torment, more intolerable each time she resisted it. And at last she found herself uttering the name involuntarily, overcome by something stronger than her dread.

‘I was surprised to meet Mr. Eldon.’

‘Did you know him?’ Stella asked simply.

‘He used to live at Wanley Manor.’

Stella seemed to revive memories.

‘Oh, that was how I knew the name. Mr. Westlake told me of him, at the time when the Manor passed to Mr. Mutimer.’

Her husband was from home, so had not been at the Boscobels’ last evening.

Adela could rest now that she had spoken. She was searching for a means of leading the

conversation into another channel, when Stella continued,—

‘You knew him formerly?’

‘Yes, when he still lived at Wanley. I have not met him since he went away.’

Stella mused.

‘I suppose he came to live in London?’

‘I understood so.’

At length Adela succeeded in speaking of something else. Mental excitement had set her blood flowing more quickly, as though an obstruction were removed. Before long the unreasoning lightness of heart began to take possession of her again. It was strangely painful. To one whom suffering has driven upon self-study the predominance of a mere mood is always more or less a troublesome mystery; in Adela’s case it was becoming a source of fear. She seemed to be losing self-control; in looking back on last evening she doubted whether her own will had been at all operative in the state of calm enjoyment to which she had attained. Was it physical weakness which put her thus at the mercy of the moment’s influences?

There came a letter from Mutimer to-day; in it he mentioned Alice and reminded Adela of her promise. This revived a trouble which had fallen out of activity for a day or two. She could not come to any decision. When at Alice’s house she had not even suggested a

return visit; at the moment it had seemed so out of the question for Alice to meet Mrs. Westlake. In any case, was it worth while exposing Stella to the difficulties of such a meeting when it could not possibly lead to anything further? One reason against it Adela was ashamed to dwell upon, yet it weighed strongly with her: she was so jealous of her friend's love, so fearful of losing anything in Stella's estimation, that she shrank from the danger of becoming associated with Mrs. Rodman in Stella's mind. Could she speak freely of Alice? Mutimer's affectionate solicitude was honourable to him, and might veil much that was disagreeable in Alice. But the intimacy between Adela and Mrs. Westlake was not yet of the kind which permits a free disclosure of troubles to which, rightly or wrongly, there attaches a sense of shame. Such troubles are always the last to be spoken of between friends; friendship must be indeed far-reaching before it includes them within its scope. They were still but learning to know each other, and that more from silent observation, from the sympathy of looks, from touchings of hands and lips, than by means of direct examination or avowal. The more she strove with her difficulty, the less able Adela felt herself to ask Mrs. Rodman to come or to mention her to Stella. The trouble spoilt her enjoyment of a concert that evening, and

kept her restless in the night ; for, though seemingly a small matter, it had vital connection with the core of her life's problem ; it forced her relentlessly to a consciousness of many things from which she had taught herself to avert her eyes.

Another thing there was which caused her anxious debate—a project which had been in her mind for nearly a year. You will not imagine that Adela had forgotten the letter from Mrs. Clay. The knowledge it brought her made the turning-point of her life. No word on the subject passed between her and Mutimer after the conversation which ended in her fainting-fit. The letter he retained, and the course he had chosen made it advisable that he should pay no heed to its request for assistance. Adela remembered the address of the writer, and made a note of it, but it was impossible to reply. Her state of mind after overhearing the conversation between Richard and his sister was such that she durst not even take the step of privately sending money, lest her husband should hear of it and it should lead to further question. She felt that, hard as it was to live with that secret, to hear Mutimer repeat his calumnies would involve her in yet worse anguish, leading perhaps to terrible things ; for, on her return to the house that night, she suffered a revelation of herself which

held her almost mute for the following days. In her heart there fought passions of which she had not known herself capable; above all a scorn so fierce, that had she but opened her lips it must have uttered itself. That she lived down by the aid of many strange expedients; but she formed a purpose, which seemed indeed nothing less than a duty, to use the opportunity of her first visit to London to seek for means of helping Emma Vine and her sister. Her long illness had not weakened this resolve; but now that she was in London the difficulties of carrying it out proved insuperable. She had always imagined herself procuring the services of some agent, but what agent was at hand? She might go herself to the address she had noted, but it was to incur a danger too great even for the end in view. If Mutimer heard of such a visit—and she had no means of assuring herself that communication between him and those people did not still exist—how would it affect him?

Adela's position would not suffer the risk of ever so slight a difference between herself and her husband. She had come to fear him, and now there was growing in her a yet graver fear of herself.

The condition of her health favoured remissness and postponement. An hour of mental agitation left her with headache and a

sense of bodily feebleness. Emma Vine she felt in the end obliged to dismiss from her thoughts; the difficulty concerning Alice she put off from day to day.

The second week of her visit was just ending, and the return to Wanley was in view, when, on entering the drawing-room in the afternoon, she found Hubert Eldon sitting there with Mrs. Westlake. If it had been possible to draw back her foot and escape unnoticed! But she was observed; Hubert had already risen. Adela fancied that Stella was closely observing her; it was not so in reality, but the persuasion wrung her heart to courage. Hubert, who did make narrow observance of her face, was struck with the cold dignity of her smile. In speaking to him she was much less friendly than at the Boscobels'. He thought he understood, and was in a measure right. A casual meeting in the world was one thing; a visit which might be supposed half intended to herself called for another demeanour. He addressed a few remarks to her, then pursued his conversation with Mrs. Westlake. Adela had time to consider his way of speaking; it was entirely natural, that of a polished man who has the habit of society, and takes pleasure in it. With utter inconsistency she felt pain that he could be so at his case in her presence. In all likelihood he had come with no other end

save that of continuing his acquaintance with Mrs. Westlake. As she listened to his voice, once more an inexplicable and uncontrollable mood possessed her—a mood of petulance, of impatience with him and with herself; with him for almost ignoring her presence, with herself for the distant way in which she had met him. An insensate rebellion against circumstances encouraged her to feel hurt; by a mystery of the mind intervening time was cancelled, and it seemed unnatural, hard to bear, that Hubert should by preference address another than herself. An impulse similar to that which had forced her to speak his name in conversation with Stella now constrained her to break silence, to say something which would require a reply. Her feeling became a sort of self-pity; he regarded her as beneath his notice, he wished her to see that his indifference was absolute; why should he treat her so cruelly?

She added a few words to a remark Mrs. Westlake made, and, the moment she had spoken, was sensible that her tone had been strangely impulsive. Stella glanced at her. Hubert, too, turned his eyes, smiled, and made some reply; she had no understanding of what he said. Had not force failed her she would have risen and left the room. Her heart sank in yet crueller humiliation; she believed there were tears in her eyes, yet had no power

to check them. He was still addressing Mrs. Westlake; herself he deemed incapable of appreciating what he said. Perhaps he even—the thought made clanging in her ears, like a rude bell—perhaps he even regarded her as a social inferior since her marriage. It was almost hysteria, to such a pitch of unreason was she wrought. Her second self looked on, anguished, helpless. The voices in the room grew distant and confused.

Then the door was opened and the servant announced—

‘Mr. Mutimer.’

It saved her. She saw her husband enter, and an ice-cold breath made frigid her throbbing veins. She fixed her eyes upon him, and could not remove them; they followed him from the door to where Stella stood to receive him. She saw that he almost paused on recognising Eldon, that his brows contracted, that involuntarily he looked at *her*.

‘You know Mr. Eldon,’ Stella said, perhaps in not quite her ordinary voice, for the meeting could in no case be a very happy one.

‘Oh yes,’ replied Mutimer, scarcely looking at Hubert, and making an idle effort at a bow.

Hubert did not reseal himself. He took leave of Stella cordially; to Adela he inclined himself at respectful distance.

Mrs. Westlake supplied conversation.

Adela, leaving her former chair, took a seat by her friend's side, but could not as yet trust her voice. Presently her husband addressed her ; it was for the first time ; he had not even given his hand.

‘ Alice is very anxious that you should dine with her before you go home. Do you think Mrs. Westlake could spare you this evening ? ’

And, on Stella's looking an inquiry, he added :

‘ My sister, Mrs. Rodman. I don't think you know her ? ’

Adela had no choice but to procure her hostess's assent to this arrangement.

‘ I'll call for you at seven o'clock, ’ Mutimer said.

Adela knew that he was commanding himself ; his tone was not quite discourteous, but he had none of the genial satisfaction which he ordinarily showed in the company of refined people. She attributed his displeasure to her neglect of Alice. But it did not affect her as it had been wont to ; she was disposed to resent it.

The time between his departure and seven o'clock she spent by herself, unoccupied, sitting as if tired. She put off the necessary changing of garments till there was scarcely time for it. When at length she was summoned she went down with flushed face.

‘I feel as if I were going to have a fever,’ she said to Stella in the drawing-room. She could not help uttering the words, but laughed immediately.

‘Your hand is really very hot,’ Stella replied.

Mutimer had a cab at the door, and was waiting in the hall.

‘You’re a long time,’ was his greeting, with more impatience than he had ever used to her.

When they were together in the hansom :

‘Why did you refuse Alice’s invitation before?’ he asked, with displeasure.

‘I didn’t think she really wished me to accept it.’

She spoke without misgiving, still resenting his manner.

‘Didn’t think? Why, what do you mean?’

She made no reply.

‘You didn’t ask her to call, either?’

‘I ought to have done so. I am very sorry to have neglected it.’

He looked at her with surprise which was very like a sneer, and kept silence till they reached the house.

One of the ladies whom Adela had already met, and a gentleman styled Captain something, were guests at dinner. Alice received her

sister-in-law with evident pleasure, though not perhaps that of pure hospitableness.

‘I do hope it won’t be too much for you,’ she said. ‘Pray leave as soon as you feel you ought to. I should never forgive myself if you took a cold or anything of the kind.’

Really, Alice had supplied herself with most becoming phrases. The novels had done much; and then she had been living in society. At dinner she laughed rather too loud, it might be, and was too much given to addressing her husband as ‘Willis;’ but her undeniable prettiness in low-necked evening dress condoned what was amiss in manner. Mr. Rodman looked too gentlemanly; he reminded one of a hero of polite melodrama on the English-French stage. The Captain talked stock-exchange, and was continually inquiring about some one or other, ‘Did he drop much?’

Mutimer was staying at the house overnight. After dinner he spoke aside with Adela.

‘I suppose you go back to-morrow?’

‘Yes, I meant to.’

‘We may as well go together, then. I’ll call for you at two o’clock.’

He considered, and changed the hour.

‘No, I’ll come at ten. I want you to go with me to buy some things. Then we’ll have lunch here.’

‘And go back for my luggage?’

‘We’ll take it away at ten o’clock and leave it at the station. I suppose you can be ready?’

‘Yes, I can be ready,’ Adela answered mechanically.

He drove back with her to Avenue Road in the Rodmans’ carriage, and left her at the door.

Mr. Westlake was expected home to-night, but had telegraphed to say that he would return in the morning. Stella had spent the evening alone; Adela found her in the boudoir, with a single lamp, reading.

‘Are you still feverish?’ Stella asked, putting to her cheek the ungloved hand.

‘I think not—I can’t say.’

Stella waited to hear something about the evening, but Adela broke the silence to say:

‘I must leave at ten in the morning. My husband will call for me.’

‘So early?’

‘Yes.’

There was silence again.

‘Will you come and see me before long, Stella?’

‘I will,’ was the gentle reply.

‘Thank you. I shall look forward to it very much.’

Then Adela said good night, speaking more cheerfully.

In her bedroom she sat as before dinner.

The fever had subsided during the past two hours, but now it crept into her blood again, insidious, tingling. And with it came so black a phantom of despair that Adela closed her eyes shudderingly, lay back as one lifeless, and wished that it were possible by the will alone to yield the breath and cease. The night pulsed about her, beat regularly like a great clock, and its pulsing smote upon her brain.

To-morrow she must follow her husband, who would come to lead her home. Home? what home had she? What home would she ever have but a grave in the grassy churchyard of Wanley? Why did death spare her when it took the life which panted but for a moment on her bosom?

She must leave Stella and go back to her duties at the Manor; must teach the children of New Wanley; must love, honour, obey her husband. Returning from Exmouth, she was glad to see her house again; now she had rather a thousand times die than go back. Horror shook her like a palsy; all that she had borne for eighteen months seemed accumulated upon her now, waited for her there at Wanley to be endured again. Oh! where was the maiden whiteness of her soul? What malignant fate had robbed her for ever of innocence and peace?

Was this fever or madness? She rose

and flung her arms against a hideous form which was about to seize her. It would not vanish, it pressed upon her. She cried, fled to the door, escaped, and called Stella's name aloud.

A door near her own opened, and Stella appeared. Adela clung to her, and was drawn into the room. Those eyes of infinite pity gazing into her own availed to calm her.

'Shall I send for some one?' Stella asked, anxiously, but with no weak bewilderment.

'No; it is not illness. But I dread to be alone; I am nervous.'

'Will you stay with me, dear?'

'Oh, Stella, let me, let me! I want to be near to you whilst I may!'

Stella's child slept peacefully in a crib; the voices were too low to wake it. Almost like another child, Adela allowed herself to be undressed.

'Shall I leave a light?' Stella asked.

'No; I can sleep. Only let me feel your arms.'

They lay in unbroken silence till both slept.

CHAPTER XI.

IN a character such as Mutimer's there will almost certainly be found a disposition to cruelty, for strong instincts of domination, even of the nobler kind, only wait for circumstances to develop crude tyranny—the cruder, of course, in proportion to the lack of native or acquired refinement which distinguishes the man. We had a hint of such things in Mutimer's progressive feeling with regard to Emma Vine. The possibility of his becoming a tyrannous husband could not be doubted by any one who viewed him closely.

There needed only the occasion, and this at length presented itself in the form of jealousy. Of all possible incentives it was the one most calamitous, for it came just when a slow and secret growth of passion was making demand for room and air. Mutimer had for some time been at a loss to understand his own sensations; he knew that his wife was becoming more and more a necessity to him, and that too when the

progress of time would have led him to expect the very opposite. He knew it during her absence at Exmouth, more still now that she was away in London. It was with reluctance that he let her leave home, only his satisfaction in her intimacy with the Westlakes and his hopes for Alice induced him to acquiesce in her departure. Yet he could show nothing of this. A lack of self-confidence, a strange shyness, embarrassed him as often as he would give play to his feelings. They were intensified by suppression, and goaded him to constant restlessness. When at most a day or two remained before Adela's return, he could no longer resist the desire to surprise her in London.

Not only did he find her in the company of the man whom he had formerly feared as a rival, but her behaviour seemed to him distinctly to betray consternation at his arrival. She was colourless, agitated, could not speak. From that moment his love was of the quality which in its manifestations is often indistinguishable from hatred. He resolved to keep her under his eye, to enforce to the uttermost his marital authority, to make her pay bitterly for the freedom she had stolen. His exasperated egoism flew at once to the extreme of suspicion; he was ready to accuse her of completed perfidy. Mrs. Westlake became his enemy; the profound distrust of culture, which was inseparable from his

mental narrowness, however ambition might lead him to disguise it, seized upon the occasion to declare itself; that woman was capable of conniving at his dishonour, even of plotting it. He would not allow Adela to remain in the house a minute longer than he could help. Even the casual absence of Mr. Westlake became a suspicious circumstance; Eldon of course chose the time for his visit.

Adela was once more safe in the Manor, under lock and key, as it were. He had not spoken of Eldon, though several times on the point of doing so. It was obvious that the return home cost her suffering, that it was making her ill. He could not get her to converse; he saw that she did not study. It was impossible to keep watch on her at all moments of the day; yet how otherwise discover what letters she wrote or received? He pondered the practicability of bribing her maid to act as a spy upon her, but feared to attempt it. He found opportunities of secretly examining the blotter on her writing-desk, and it convinced him that she had written to Mrs. Westlake. It maddened him that he had not the courage to take a single open step, to forbid, for instance, all future correspondence with London. To do so would be to declare his suspicions. He wished to declare them; it would have gratified

him intensely to vomit impeachments, to terrify her with coarseness and violence; but, on the other hand, by keeping quiet he might surprise positive evidence, and if only he did!

She was ill; he had a distinct pleasure in observing it. She longed for quiet and retirement; he neglected his business to force his company upon her, to laugh and talk loudly. She with difficulty read a page; he made her read aloud to him by the hour, or write translations for him from French and German. The pale anguish of her face was his joy; it fascinated him, fired his senses, made him a demon of vicious cruelty. Yet he durst not as much as touch her hand when she sat before him. Her purity, which was her safeguard, stirred his venom; he worshipped it, and would have smothered it in foulness.

‘Hadn’t you better have the doctor to see you?’ he began one morning when he had followed her from the dining-room to her boudoir.

‘The doctor? Why?’

‘You don’t seem up to the mark,’ he replied, avoiding her look.

Adela kept silence.

‘You were well enough in London, I suppose?’

‘I am never very strong.’

‘I think you might be a bit more cheerful.’

‘I will try to be.’

This submission always aggravated his disease—by what other name to call it? He would have had her resist him, that he might know the pleasure of crushing her will.

He walked about the room, then suddenly :
‘What is that man Eldon doing?’

Adela looked at him with surprise. It had never entered her thoughts that the meeting with Eldon would cost him more than a passing annoyance—she knew he disliked him—and least of all that such annoyance would in any way be connected with herself. It was possible, of course, that some idle tongue had gossiped of her former friendship with Hubert, but there was no one save Letty who knew what her feelings really had been, and was not the fact of her marriage enough to remove any suspicion that Mutimer might formerly have entertained? But the manner of his question was so singular, the introduction of Eldon’s name so abrupt, that she could not but discern in a measure what was in his mind.

She made reply :

‘I don’t understand. Do you mean how is he engaged?’

‘How comes he to know Mrs. Westlake?’

‘Through common friends—some people named Boscobel. Mr. Boscobel is an artist, and Mr. Eldon appears to be studying art.’

Her voice was quite steady through this explanation. The surprise seemed to have enabled her to regard him unmoved, almost with curiosity.

‘I suppose he’s constantly there—at the Westlakes’?’

‘That was his first visit. We met him a few evenings before at the Boscobels’, at dinner. It was then he made Mrs. Westlake’s acquaintance.’

Mutimer moved his head as if to signify indifference. But Adela had found an unexpected relief in speaking thus openly; she was tempted to go further.

‘I believe he writes about pictures. Mrs. Boscobel told me that he had been some time in Italy.’

‘Well and good; I don’t care to hear about his affairs. So you dined with these Boscobel people?’

‘Yes.’

He smiled disagreeably.

‘I thought you were rather particular about telling the truth. You told Alice you never dined out.’

‘I don’t think I said that,’ Adela replied quietly.

He paused; then:

‘What fault have you to find with Alice, eh?’

Adela was not in the mood for evasions ; she answered in much the same tone as she had used in speaking of Hubert.

‘I don’t think she likes me. If she did, I should be able to be more friendly with her. Her world is so very different from ours.’

‘Different? You mean you don’t like Rodman?’

‘I was not thinking of Mr. Rodman. I mean that her friends are not the same as ours.’

Mutimer forgot for a moment his pre-occupation in thought of Alice.

‘Was there anything wrong with the people you met there?’

She was silent.

‘Just tell me what you think. I want to know. What did you object to?’

‘I don’t think they were the best kind of people.’

‘The best kind? I suppose they are what you call ladies and gentlemen?’

‘You must have felt that they were not quite the same as the Westlakes, for instance.’

‘The Westlakes!’

He named them sneeringly, to Adela’s astonishment. And he added as he walked towards the door :

‘There isn’t much to be said for some of the people you meet there.’

A new complexity was introduced into her

life. Viewed by this recent light, Mutimer's behaviour since the return from London was not so difficult to understand ; but the problem of how to bear with it became the harder. There were hours when Adela's soul was like a bird of the woods cage-pent : it dashed itself against the bars of fate, and in anguish conceived the most desperate attempts for freedom. She could always die, but was it not hard to perish in her youth and with the world's cup of bliss untasted? Flight? Ah! whither could she flee? The thought of the misery she would leave behind her, the disgrace that would fall upon her mother—this would alone make flight impossible. Yet could she conceive life such as this prolonging itself into the hopeless years, renunciation her strength and her reward, duty a grinning skeleton at her bedside? It grew harder daily. More than a year ago she thought that the worst was over, and since then had known the solace of self-forgetful idealisms, of ascetic striving. It was all illusion, the spinning of a desolate heart. There was no help now, for she knew herself and the world. Foolish, foolish child, who with her own hand had flung away the jewel of existence like a thing of no price! Her lot appeared single in its haplessness. She thought of Stella, of Letty, even of Alice ; *they* had not been doomed to learn in suffering. To her,

alone of all women, knowledge had come with a curse.

A month passed. Since Rodman's departure from Wanley, 'Arry Mutimer was living at the Manor. Her husband and 'Arry were Adela's sole companions; the former she dreaded, the approach of the latter always caused her insuperable disgust. To Letty there was born a son; Adela could not bend to the little one with a whole heart; her own desolate motherhood wailed the more bitterly.

Once more a change was coming. Alice and her husband were going to spend August at a French watering-place, and Mutimer proposed to join them for a fortnight; Adela of course would be of the party. The invitation came from Rodman, who had reasons for wishing to get his brother-in-law aside for a little quiet talk. Rodman had large views, was at present pondering a financial scheme in which he needed a partner—one with capital of course. He knew that New Wanley was proving anything but a prosperous concern, commercially speaking; he divined, moreover, that Mutimer was not wholly satisfied with the state of affairs. By judicious management the Socialist might even be induced to abandon the non-paying enterprise, and, though not perhaps ostensibly, embark in one that promised very different results—at all events to

Mr. Rodman. The scheme was not of mushroom growth ; it dated from a time but little posterior to Mr. Rodman's first meeting with Alice Mutimer. 'Arry had been granted appetising sniffs at the cookery in progress, though the youth was naturally left without precise information as to the ingredients. The result was a surprising self-restraint on 'Arry's part. The influence which poor Keene had so bunglingly tried to obtain over him, the more astute Mr. Rodman had compassed without difficulty ; beginning with the loan of small sums, to be repaid when 'Arry attained his majority, he little by little made the prospective man of capital the creature of his directions ; in something less than two more years Rodman looked to find ample recompense for his expenditure and trouble. But that was a mere parergon ; to secure Richard Mutimer was the great end steadily held in view.

Rodman and his wife came to Wanley to spend three days before all together set out for the Continent. Adela accepted the course of things, abandoned herself to the stream. For a week her husband had been milder ; we know the instinct that draws the cat's paws from the flagging mouse.

Alice, no longer much interested in novels, must needs talk with some one ; she honoured Adela with much of her confidence, seeming

to forget and forgive, in reality delighted to recount her London experiences to her poor tame sister-in-law. Alice, too, had been at moments introduced to her husband's kitchen ; she threw out vague hints of a wonderful repast in preparation.

'Willis is going to buy me a house in Brighton,' she said, among other things. I shall run down whenever I feel it would do me good. You've no idea how kind he is.'

There was, in fact, an 'advancement clause' in Alice's deed of settlement. If Mr. Rodman showed himself particularly anxious to cultivate the friendship of Mr. Alfred Waltham, possibly one might look for the explanation to the terms of that same document.

There came a Sunday morning. Preparations for departure on the morrow were practically completed. The weather was delightful. Adela finished breakfast in time to wander a little about the garden before it was the hour for church ; her husband and Rodman breakfasted with her, and went to smoke in the library. Alice and 'Arry did not present themselves till the church bells had ceased.

Adela was glad to be alone in the dusky pew. She was the first of the congregation to arrive, and she sat, as always, with the curtains enclosing her save in front. The bells ringing above the roof had a soothing effect upon her,

and gave strange turns to her thought. So had their summoning rung out to generation after generation ; so would it ring long after she was buried and at rest. Where would her grave be? She was going for the first time to a foreign country ; perhaps death might come to her there. Then she would lie for ever among strangers, and her place be forgotten. Would it not be the fitting end of so sad and short a life?

In the front of the pew was a cupboard ; the upper portion, which contained the service books, was closed with a long, narrow door, opening downwards on horizontal hinges ; the shelf on which the books lay went back into darkness, being, perhaps, two feet broad. Below this shelf was the door of the lower and much larger receptacle ; it slid longitudinally, and revealed a couple of buffets, kept here to supplement the number in the pew when necessary. Adela had only once opened the sliding door, and then merely to glance into the dark hollows and close it again. Probably the buffets had lain undisturbed for years.

On entering the pew this morning she had as usual dropped the upper door, and had laid her large church service open on the shelf, where she could reach it as soon as Mr. Wyvern began to read. Then began her reverie. From thoughts of the grave she passed to memories

of her wedding day. How often the scene of that morning had re-enacted itself in her mind! Often she dreamed it all over, and woke as from a nightmare. She wished it had not taken place in this church; it troubled the sacred recollections of her maiden peace. She began to think it over once more, attracted by the pain it caused her, and, on coming to the bestowal of the ring, an odd caprice led her to draw the circlet itself from her finger. When she had done it she trembled. The hand looked so strange. Oh, her hand, her hand! Once ringless indeed, once her own to give, to stretch forth in pledge of the heart's imperishable faith! Now a prisoner for ever; but, thus ringless, so like a maiden hand once more. There came a foolish sense of ease. She would keep her finger free yet a little, perhaps through the service. She bent forward and laid the ring on the open book.

More dreams, quite other than before; then the organ began its prelude, a tremor passing through the church before the sound broke forth. Adela sank deeper in reverie. At length Mr. Wyvern's voice roused her; she stood up and reached her book; but she had wholly forgotten that the ring lay upon it, and was only reminded by a glimpse of it rolling away on the shelf, rolling to the back of the cupboard. But it did not stop there; surely it

was the ring that she heard fall down below, behind the large sliding door. She had a sudden fright lest it should be lost, and stooped at once to search for it.

She drew back the door, pushed aside the buffets, then groped in the darkness. She touched the ring. But something else lay there; it seemed a long piece of thick paper, folded. This too she brought forth, and, having slipped the ring on her finger, looked to see what she had found.

It was parchment. She unfolded it, and saw that it was covered with writing in a clerkly hand. How strange!

‘This is the last will and testament of me,
RICHARD MUTIMER——’

Her hand shook. She felt as if the sides of the pew were circling about her, as if she stood amid falling and changing things.

She looked to the foot of the sheet.

‘In witness whereof I, the said Richard Mutimer, have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of October, 187—.’

The date was some six months prior to old Richard Mutimer’s death. This could be nothing but the will which every one believed him to have destroyed.

Adela sank upon the seat. Her ring! Had she picked it up? Yes; it was again upon her finger. How had it chanced to fall down

below? She rose again and examined the cupboard; there was a gap of four or five inches at the back of the upper shelf.

Had the will fallen in the same way? Adela conjectured that thus it had been lost, though when or under what circumstances she could not imagine. We, who are calmer, may conceive the old man to have taken his will to church with him on the morning of his death, he being then greatly troubled about the changes he had in view. Perhaps he laid the folded parchment on the shelf and rested one of the large books in front of it. He breathed his last. Then the old woman, whose duty it was to put the pews in order, hurriedly throwing the books into the cupboard as soon as the dead man was removed, perchance pushed the document so far back that it slipped through the gap and down behind the buffets.

At all events, no one has ever hit upon a likelier explanation.

CHAPTER XII.

SHE could not sit through the service, yet to leave the church she would have to walk the whole length of the aisle. What did it matter? It would very soon be known why she had gone away, and to face for a moment the wonder of Sunday-clad villagers is not a grave trial. Adela opened the pew door and quitted the church, the parchment held beneath her mantle.

As she issued from the porch the sun smote warm upon her face; it encouraged a feeling of gladness which had followed her astonishment. She had discovered the tenor of the will; it affected her with a sudden joy, undisturbed at first by any reflection. The thought of self was slow in coming, and had not power to trouble her *greatly* even when she faced it. Befall herself what might, she held against her heart a power which was the utmost limit of that heart's desire. So vast, so undreamt, so mysteriously given to her, that it seemed preter-

natural. Her weakness was become strength ; with a single word she could work changes such as it had seemed no human agency could bring about.

To her, to her it had been given ! What was all her suffering, crowned with power like this ?

She durst not take the will from beneath her mantle, though burning to reassure herself of its contents. Not till she was locked in her room. If any one met her as she entered the house, her excuse would be that she did not feel well.

But as she hurried towards the Manor she all at once found herself face to face with her brother. Alfred was having a ramble, rather glad to get out of hearing of the baby this Sunday morning.

‘Hollo, what’s up ?’ was his exclamation.

Adela feared lest her face had betrayed her. She was conscious that her look could not be that of illness.

‘I am obliged to go home,’ she said, ‘I have forgotten something.’

‘I should have thought you’d rather have let the house burn down than scutter away in this profane fashion. All right, I won’t stop you.’

She hesitated, tempted to give some hint. But before she could speak, Alfred continued :

‘So Mutimer’s going to throw it up.’

‘What?’ she asked in surprise.

He nodded towards New Wanley.

‘Throw it up?’

‘So I understand. Don’t mention that I said anything ; I supposed you knew.’

‘I knew nothing. You mean that he is going to abandon the works?’

‘Something of the kind, I fancy. I don’t know that it’s decided, but that fellow Rodman—well, time enough to talk about it. It’s a pity, that’s all I can say. Still, if he’s really losing——’

‘Losing? But he never expected to make money.’

‘No, but I fancy he’s beginning to see things in a different light. I tell you what it is, Adela ; I can’t stand that fellow Rodman. I’ve got an idea he’s up to something. Don’t let him lead Mutimer by the nose, that’s all. But this isn’t Sunday talk. Youngster rather obstreperous this morning.’

Adela had no desire to question further ; she let her brother pass on, and continued her own walk at a more moderate pace.

Alfred’s words put her in mind of considerations to which in her excitement she had given no thought. New Wanley was no longer her husband’s property, and the great Socialist undertaking must come to an end. In spite of

her personal feeling, she could not view with indifference the failure of an attempt which she had trained herself to regard as nobly planned, and full of importance to the world at large. Though she no longer saw Mutimer's character in the same light as when first she bent her nature to his direction, she still would have attributed to him a higher grief than the merely self-regarding; she had never suspected him of insincerity in his public zeal. Mutimer had been scrupulous to avoid any utterance which might betray half-heartedness; in his sullen fits of late he had even made it a reproach against her that she cared little for his own deepest interests. To his wife last of all he would have confessed a failing in his enthusiasm: jealousy had made him discourteous, had lowered the tone of his intercourse with her; but to figure as a hero in her eyes was no less, nay more, than ever a leading motive in his life. But if what Alfred said was true, Adela saw that in this also she had deceived herself: the man whose very heart was in a great cause would sacrifice everything, and fight on to the uttermost verge of hope. There was no longer room for regret on his account.

On reaching the Manor gates she feared to walk straight up to the house; she felt that, if she met her husband, she could not command her face, and her tongue would falter. She took

a path which led round to the gardens in the rear. She had remembered a little summer-house which stood beyond the kitchen-garden, in a spot sure to be solitary at this hour. There she could read the will attentively, and fix her resolution before entering the house.

Trees and bushes screened her. She neared the summer-house, and was at the very door before she perceived that it was occupied. There sat 'Arry and a kitchenmaid, very close to each other, chatting confidentially. 'Arry looked up, and something as near a blush as he was capable of came to his face. The kitchen damsel followed the direction of his eyes, and was terror-stricken.

Adela hastened away. An unspeakable loathing turned her heart. She scarcely wondered, but pressed the parchment closer, and joyed in the thought that she would so soon be free of this tainted air.

She no longer hesitated to enter, and was fortunate enough to reach her room without meeting any one. She locked the door, then unfolded the will and began to peruse it with care.

The testator devised the whole of his real estate to Hubert Eldon; to Hubert also he bequeathed his personal property, subject to certain charges. These were—first, the payment of a legacy of one thousand pounds to Mrs.

Eldon ; secondly, of a legacy of five hundred pounds to Mr. Yottle, the solicitor ; thirdly, of an annuity of one hundred and seven pounds to the testator's great-nephew, Richard Mutimer, such sum being the yearly product of a specified investment. The annuity was to extend to the life of Richard's widow, should he leave one ; but power was given to the trustee to make over to Richard Mutimer, or to his widow, any part or the whole of the invested capital, if he felt satisfied that to do so would be for the annuitant's benefit. 'It is not my wish'—these words followed the directions—'to put the said Richard Mutimer above the need of supporting himself by honest work, but only to aid him to make use of the abilities which I understand he possesses, and to become a credit to the class to which he belongs.'

The executors were Hubert Eldon himself and the lawyer Mr. Yottle.

A man of the world brought face to face with startling revelations of this kind naturally turns at once to thought of technicalities, evasions, compromises. Adela's simpler mind fixed itself upon the plain sense of the will ; that meant restitution to the uttermost farthing. For more than two years Hubert Eldon had been kept out of his possessions ; others had been using them, and lavishly. Would it be possible for her husband to restore? He must have ex-

pended great sums, and of his own he had not a penny.

Thought for herself came last. Mutimer must abandon Wanley, and whither he went, thither must she go also. Their income would be a hundred and seven pounds. Her husband became once more a working man. Doubtless he would return to London; their home would be a poor one, like that of ordinary working folk.

How would he bear it? How would he take this from *her*?

Fear crept insidiously about her heart, though she fought to banish it. It was a fear of the instinct, clinging to trifles in the memory, feeding upon tones, glances, the impressions of forgotten moments. She was conscious that here at length was the crucial test of her husband's nature, and in spite of every generous impulse she dreaded the issue. To that dread she durst not abandon herself; to let it grow even for an instant cost her a sensation of faintness, a desire to flee for cover to those who would naturally protect her. To give up all—and to Hubert Eldon! She recalled his voice when the other day he spoke of Hubert. He had not since recurred to the subject, but his manner still bore the significance with which that conversation had invested it. No dream of suspicions on his part had come to her, but

it was enough that something had happened to intensify his dislike of Hubert. Of her many fears, here was one which couched dark and shapeless in the background.

A feeble woman would have chosen any one—her mother, her brother—rather than Mutimer himself for the first participant in such a discovery. Adela was not feeble, and the very danger, though it might chill her senses, nerved her soul. Was she not making him too ignoble? Was she not herself responsible for much of the strangeness in his behaviour of late? The question she had once asked herself, whether he loved her, she could not answer doubtfully; was it not his love that had set her icily against him? If she could not render him love in return, that was the wrong she did him, the sin she had committed in becoming his wife. Adela by this time knew too well that, in her threefold vows, love had of right the foremost place; honour and obedience could not exist without love. Her wrong was involuntary, none the less she owed him such reparation as was possible; she must keep her mind open to his better qualities. A man might fall, yet not be irredeemably base. Oh, that she had never known of that poor girl in London! Base, doubly and trebly base, had been his behaviour there, for one ill deed had drawn others after it. But his repentance, his

humiliation, must have been deep, and of the kind which strengthens against ill-doing in the future.

It had to be done, and had better be done quickly. Adela went to her boudoir and rang the bell. The servant who came told her that Mutimer was in the house. She summoned him.

It was five minutes before he appeared. He was preoccupied, though not gloomily so.

‘I thought you were at church,’ he said, regarding her absently.

‘I came away—because I found something—this!’

She had hoped to speak with calmness, but the interval of waiting had agitated her, and the fear which no effort could allay struck her heart as he entered. She held the parchment to him.

‘What is it?’ he asked, his attention gradually awakened by surprise. He did not move forward to meet her extended hand.

‘You will see—it is the will that we thought was destroyed—old Mr. Mutimer’s will.’

She rose and brought it to him. He looked at her with a sceptical smile, which was involuntary, and lingered on his face even after he had begun to read the document.

Adela seated herself again; she had scarcely power to stand. There was a long silence.

‘Where did you find this?’ Mutimer inquired at length. His tone astonished her; it was almost indifferent. But he did not raise his eyes.

She explained. It was needless, she thought, to give a reason for her search in the lower cupboard; but the first thing that occurred to Mutimer was to demand such reason.

A moment’s hesitation; then:

‘A piece of money rolled down behind the shelf on which the books are; there is a gap at the back. I suppose that is how the will fell down.’

His eye was now steadily fixed upon her, coldly scrutinising, as one regards a suspected stranger. Adela was made wretched by the inevitable falsehood. She felt herself reddening under his gaze.

He seemed to fall into absent-mindedness, then re-read the document. Then he took out his watch.

‘The people are out of church. Come and show me where it was.’

With a deep sense of relief she went away to put on her bonnet. To escape for a moment was what she needed, and the self-command of his voice seemed to assure her against her worse fears. She felt grateful to him for preserving his dignity. The future lost one of its terrors if only she could respect him.

They walked side by side to the church in silence; Mutimer had put the will into his pocket. At the wicket he paused.

‘Will Wyvern be in there?’

The question was answered by the appearance of the vicar himself, who just then came forth from the front doorway. He approached them, with a hope that Adela had not been obliged to leave through indisposition.

‘A little faintness,’ Mutimer was quick to reply. ‘We are going to look for something she dropped in the pew.’

Mr. Wyvern passed on. Only the pew-opener was moving about the aisles. She looked with surprise at the pair as they entered.

‘Tell her the same,’ Mutimer commanded, under his breath.

The old woman was of course ready with offers of assistance, but a word from Richard sufficed to keep her away.

The examination was quickly made, and they returned as they had come, without exchanging a word on the way. They went upstairs again to the boudoir.

‘Sit down,’ Mutimer said briefly.

He himself continued to stand, again examining the will.

‘I should think,’ he began slowly, ‘it’s as likely as not that this is a forgery.’

‘A forgery? But who could have——’

Her voice failed.

‘He’s not likely to have run the risk himself, I suppose,’ Mutimer pursued, with a quiet sneer, ‘but no doubt there are people who would benefit by it.’

Adela had an impulse of indignation. It showed itself in her cold, steady reply.

‘The will was thick with dust. It has been lying there a long time.’

‘Of course. They wouldn’t bungle over an important thing like this.’

He was once more scrutinising her. The suspicion was a genuine one, and involved even more than Adela could imagine. If there had been a plot, such plot assuredly included the discoverer of the document. Could he in his heart charge Adela with that? There were two voices at his ear, and of equal persuasiveness. Even to look into her face did not silence the calumnious whispering. Her beauty was fuel to his jealousy, and his jealousy alone made the supposition of her guilt for a moment tenable. It was on his lips to accuse her, to ease himself with savage innuendoes, those ‘easy things to understand’ which come naturally from such a man in such a situation. But to do that would be to break with her for ever, and the voice that urged her innocence would not let him incur such risk. The loss of his possessions was a calamity so great that

as yet he could not realise its possibility; the loss of his wife impressed his imagination more immediately, and was in this moment the more active fear.

He was in the strange position of a man who finds all at once that he *dare* not believe that which he has been trying his best to believe. If Adela were guilty of plotting with Eldon, it meant that he himself was the object of her utter hatred, a hideous thought to entertain. It threw him back upon her innocence. Egoism had to do the work of the finer moral perceptions.

‘Isn’t it rather strange,’ he said, not this time sneeringly, but seeking for support against his intolerable suspicions, ‘that you never moved those buffets before?’

‘I never had need of them.’

‘And that hole has never been cleaned out?’

‘Never; clearly never.’

She had risen to her feet, impelled by a glimmering of the thought in which he examined her. What she next said came from her without premeditation. Her tongue seemed to speak independently of her will.

‘One thing I have said that was not true. It was not money that slipped down, but my ring. I had taken it off and laid it on the Prayer-book.’

‘Your ring?’ he repeated, with cold surprise. ‘Do you always take your ring off in church, then?’

As soon as the words were spoken she had gone deadly pale. Was it well to say that? Must there follow yet more explanation? She with difficulty overcame an impulse to speak on and disclose all her mind, the same kind of impulse she had known several times of late. Sheer dread this time prevailed. The eyes that were upon her concealed fire; what madness tempted her to provoke its outburst?

‘I have never done so before,’ she replied confusedly.

‘Why to-day, then?’

She did not answer.

‘And why did you tell—why did you say it was money?’

‘I can’t explain that,’ she answered, her head bowed. ‘I took off the ring thoughtlessly; it is rather loose; my finger is thinner than it used to be.’

On the track of cunning Mutimer’s mind was keen enough; only amid the complexities of such motives as sway a pure heart in trouble was he quite at a loss. This confession of untruthfulness might on the face of it have spoken in Adela’s favour; but his very understanding of that made him seek for subtle treachery. She saw he suspected her; was it not good

policy to seem perfectly frank, even if such frankness for the moment gave a strengthening to suspicion? What devilish ingenuity might after all be concealed in this woman, whom he had taken for simplicity itself!

The first bell for luncheon disturbed his reflections.

‘Please sit down,’ he said, pointing to the chair. ‘We can’t end our talk just yet.’

She obeyed him, glad again to rest her trembling limbs.

‘If you suspect it to be a forgery,’ she said, when she had waited in vain for him to speak further, ‘the best way of deciding is to go at once to Mr. Yottle. He will remember; it was he drew up the will.’

He flashed a glance at her.

‘I’m perfectly aware of that. If this is forged, the lawyer has of course given his help. He would be glad to see me.’

Again the suspicion was genuine. Mutimer felt himself hedged in; every avenue of escape to which his thoughts turned was closed in advance. There was no one he would not now have suspected. The full meaning of his position was growing upon him; it made a ferment in his mind.

‘Mr. Yottle!’ Adela exclaimed in astonishment. ‘You think it possible that he—— Oh, that is folly!’

Yes, it was folly ; her voice assured him of it, proclaiming at the same time the folly of his whole doubt. It was falling to pieces, and, as it fell, disclosing the image of his fate, inexorable, inconceivable.

He stood for more than five minutes in silence. Then he drew a little nearer to her, and asked in an unsteady voice :

‘ Are you glad of this ? ’

‘ Glad of it ? ’ she repeated under her breath.

‘ Yes ; shall you be glad to see me lose everything ? ’

‘ You cannot wish to keep what belongs to others. In that sense I think we ought to be glad that the will is found.’

She spoke so coldly that he drew away from her again. The second bell rang.

‘ They had better have lunch without us,’ he said.

He rang and bade the servant ask Mr. and Mrs. Rodman to lunch alone. Then he returned to an earlier point of the discussion.

‘ You say it was thick with dust ? ’

‘ It was. I believe the lower cupboard has never been open since Mr. Mutimer’s death.’

‘ Why should he take a will to church with him ? ’

Adela shook her head.

‘ If he did,’ Mutimer pursued, ‘ I suppose it was to think over the new one he was going to

make. You know, of course, that he never intended *this* to be his will?’

‘We do not know what his last thoughts may have been,’ Adela replied, in a low voice but firmly.

‘Yes, I think we do. I mean to say, we are quite sure he meant to alter *this*. Yottle was expecting the new will.’

‘Death took him before he could make it. He left this.’

Her quiet opposition was breath to the fire of his jealousy. He could no longer maintain his voice of argument.

‘It just means this: you won’t hear anything against the will, and you’re glad of it.’

‘Your loss is mine.’

He looked at her, and again drew nearer.

‘It’s not very likely that you’ll stay to share it.’

‘Stay?’ She watched his movements with apprehension. ‘How can I separate my future from yours?’

He desired to touch her, to give some sign of his mastery, whether tenderly or with rude force mattered little.

‘It’s easy to say that, but we know it doesn’t mean much.’

His tongue stammered. As Adela rose and tried to move apart, he caught her arm roughly, then her waist, and kissed her several times

about the face. Released, she sank back upon the chair, pale, terrified, her breath caught with voiceless sobs. Mutimer turned away and leaned his arms upon the mantelpiece. His body trembled.

Neither could count the minutes that followed. An inexplicable shame kept Mutimer silent and motionless. Adela, when the shock of repugnance had passed over, almost forgot the subject of their conversation in vain endeavours to understand this man in whose power she was. His passion was mysterious, revolting—impossible for her to reconcile with his usual bearing, with his character as she understood it. It was more than a year since he had mingled his talk to her with any such sign of affection, and her feeling was one of outrage. What protection had she? The caresses had followed upon an insult, and were themselves brutal, degrading. It was a realisation of one of those half-formed fears which had so long haunted her in his presence.

What would life be with him, away from the protections of a wealthy home, when circumstances would have made him once more the London artisan, and in doing so would have added harshness to his natural temper; when he would no longer find it worth while to preserve the semblance of gentle breeding? Was there strength in her to endure that?

Presently he turned, and she heard him speak her name. She raised her eyes with a half-smile of abashment. He approached and took her hand.

‘Have you thought what this means to me?’ he asked, in a much softer voice.

‘I know it must be very hard.’

‘I don’t mean in that way. I’m not thinking of the change back to poverty. It’s my work in New Wanley, my splendid opportunity of helping on Socialism. Think, just when everything is fairly started! You can’t feel it as I do, I suppose. You haven’t the same interest in the work. I hoped once you would have had.’

Adela remembered what her brother had said, but she could not allude to it. To question was useless. She thought of a previous occasion on which he had justified himself when accused.

He still held her hand.

‘Which would do the most good with this money, he or I?’

‘We cannot ask that question.’

‘Yes, we can. We ought to. At all events, *I* ought to. Think what it means. In my hands the money is used for the good of a suffering class, for the good of the whole country in the end. He would just spend it on himself, like other rich men. It isn’t every day that a man of my principles gets the means of

putting them into practice. Eldon is well enough off; long ago he's made up his mind to the loss of Wanley. It's like robbing poor people just to give money where it isn't wanted.'

She withdrew her hand, saying coldly :

'I can understand your looking at it in this way. But we can't help it.'

'Why can't we?' His voice grew disagreeable in its effort to be insinuating. 'It seems to me that we can and ought to help it. It would be quite different if you and I had just been enjoying ourselves and thinking of no one else.' He thought it a skilful stroke to unite their names thus. 'We haven't done anything of the kind; we've denied ourselves all sorts of things just to be able to spend more on New Wanley. You know what I've always said, that I hold the money in trust for the Union. Isn't it true? I don't feel justified in giving it up. The end is too important. The good of thousands, of hundreds of thousands, is at stake.'

Adela looked him in the face searchingly.

'But how can we help it? There is the will.'

Mutimer met her eyes.

'No one knows of it but ourselves, Adela.'

It was not indignation that her look expressed, but at first a kind of shocked surprise and then profound trouble. It was with difficulty that she found words.

'You are not speaking in earnest?'

‘I am!’ he exclaimed, almost hopefully. ‘In downright earnest. There’s nothing to be ashamed of.’ He said it because he felt that her gaze was breeding shame in him. ‘It isn’t for myself, it’s for the cause, for the good of my fellow-men. Don’t say anything till you’ve thought. Look, Adela, you’re not hard-hearted, and you know how it used to pain you to read of the poor wretches who can’t earn enough to keep themselves alive. It’s for their sake. If they could be here and know of this, they’d go down on their knees to you. You *can’t* rob them of a chance! It’s like snatching a bit of bread out of their mouths when they’re dying of hunger.’

The fervour with which he pleaded went far to convince himself; for the moment he lost sight of everything but the necessity of persuading Adela, and his zeal could scarcely have been greater had he been actuated by the purest unselfishness. He was speaking as Adela had never heard him speak, with modulations of the voice which were almost sentimental, like one pleading for love. In his heart he despaired of removing her scruples, but he overcame this with vehement entreaty. A true instinct forbade him to touch on her own interests; he had not lived so long with Adela without attaining some perception of the nobler ways of thought. But as often as he raised his eyes to hers he saw the futility of all his words. Her direct gaze at length brought him to unwilling silence.

‘Would you then,’ Adela asked gravely, ‘destroy this will?’

‘Yes.’

The monosyllable was all he cared to reply.

‘I can scarcely believe you. Such a thing is impossible. You could not do it.’

‘It’s my duty to do it.’

‘This is unworthy of you. It is a crime, in law and in conscience. How can you so deceive yourself? After such an act as that, whatever you did would be worthless, vain.’

‘Why?’

‘Because no one can do great work of the kind you aim at unless he is himself guided by the strictest honour. Every word you spoke would be a falsehood. Oh, can’t you see that, as plainly as the light of day? The results of your work! Why, nothing you could possibly do with all this money would be one-half as good as to let every one know that you honourably gave it up when it was in your power dishonestly to keep it! Oh, surely *that* is the kind of example that the world needs! What causes all the misery but dishonesty and selfishness? If you do away with that, you gain all you are working for. The example! You should prize the opportunity. You are deceiving yourself; it is a temptation that you are yielding to. Think a moment; you will see that I am right. You cannot do a thing so unworthy of yourself.’

He stood for a moment doggedly, then replied :

‘I can and I shall do it.’

‘Never!’ Adela rose and faced him. ‘You shall listen to me till you understand. You, who pride yourself on your high motives! For your own sake scorn this temptation. Let me take the will away. I will put it somewhere till to-morrow. You will see clearly by then. I know how dreadful this loss seems to you, but you must be stronger.’

He stood between her and the table on which the parchment lay, and waived her back as she approached. Adela’s voice trembled, but there was not a note in it that he could resent.

‘You wrong yourself, and you are cruel to me. How could I live with you if you did such a thing? How could I remain in this house when it was no longer yours? It is impossible, a thousand times impossible. You *cannot* mean it! If you do this in spite of everything I can say, you are more cruel than if you raised your hand and struck me. You make my life a shame; you dishonour and degrade me.’

‘That’s all nonsense,’ he replied sullenly, the jealous motive possessing him again at the sight of her gleaming eyes. ‘It’s you who don’t understand, and just because you have no sympathy with my work. Any one would

think you cared for nothing but to take the money from me, just to——’

Even in his access of spiteful anger he checked himself, and dropped to another tone.

‘I take all the responsibility. You have nothing to do with it. What seems right to me, I shall do. I am your husband, and you’ve no voice in a thing like this.’

‘No voice? Have I no right to save you from ruin? Must a wife stand by and see her husband commit a crime? Have you no duty to me? What becomes of our married life if you rob me of all respect for you?’

‘I tell you I am doing it with a good motive. If you were a thorough Socialist, you would respect me all the more. This money was made out of overworked——’

He was laying his hand on the will; she sprang forward and grasped his arm.

‘Richard, give it to me!’

‘No, I shall not.’

He had satisfied himself that if the will was actually destroyed she would acquiesce in silence; the shame she spoke of would constrain her. He pushed her away without violence, and moved towards the door. But her muteness caused him to turn and regard her. She was leaning forward, her lips parted, her eyes fixed in despair.

‘Richard!’

‘Well?’

‘Are you trying me?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Do you believe that I should let you do that and help you to hide it?’

‘You will come to see that I was right, and be glad that I paid no heed to you.’

‘Then you don’t know me. Though you are my husband I would make public what you had done. Nothing should silence me. Do you drive me to that?’

The absence of passion in her voice impressed him far more than violence could have done. Her countenance had changed from pleading to scorn.

He stood uncertain.

‘Now indeed,’ Adela continued, ‘I am doing what no woman should have to do.’ Her voice became bitter. ‘I have not a man’s strength; I can only threaten you with shame which will fall more heavily on myself.’

‘Your word against mine,’ he muttered, trying to smile.

‘You could defend yourself by declaring me infamous?’

Did he know the meaning of that flash across her face? Only when the words were uttered did their full significance strike Adela herself.

‘You could defend yourself by saying that I lied against you?’

He regarded her from beneath his eyebrows

as she repeated the question. In the silence which followed he seated himself on the chair nearest to him. Adela too sat down.

For more than a quarter of an hour they remained thus, no word exchanged. Then Adela rose and approached her husband.

‘If I order the carriage,’ she said softly, ‘will you come with me at once to Belwick?’

He gave no answer. He was sitting with his legs crossed, the will held over his knee.

‘I am sorry you have this trial,’ she continued, ‘deeply sorry. But you have won, I know you have won!’

He turned his eyes in a direction away from her, hesitated, rose.

‘Get your things on.’

He was going to the door.

‘Richard!’

She held her hand for the parchment.

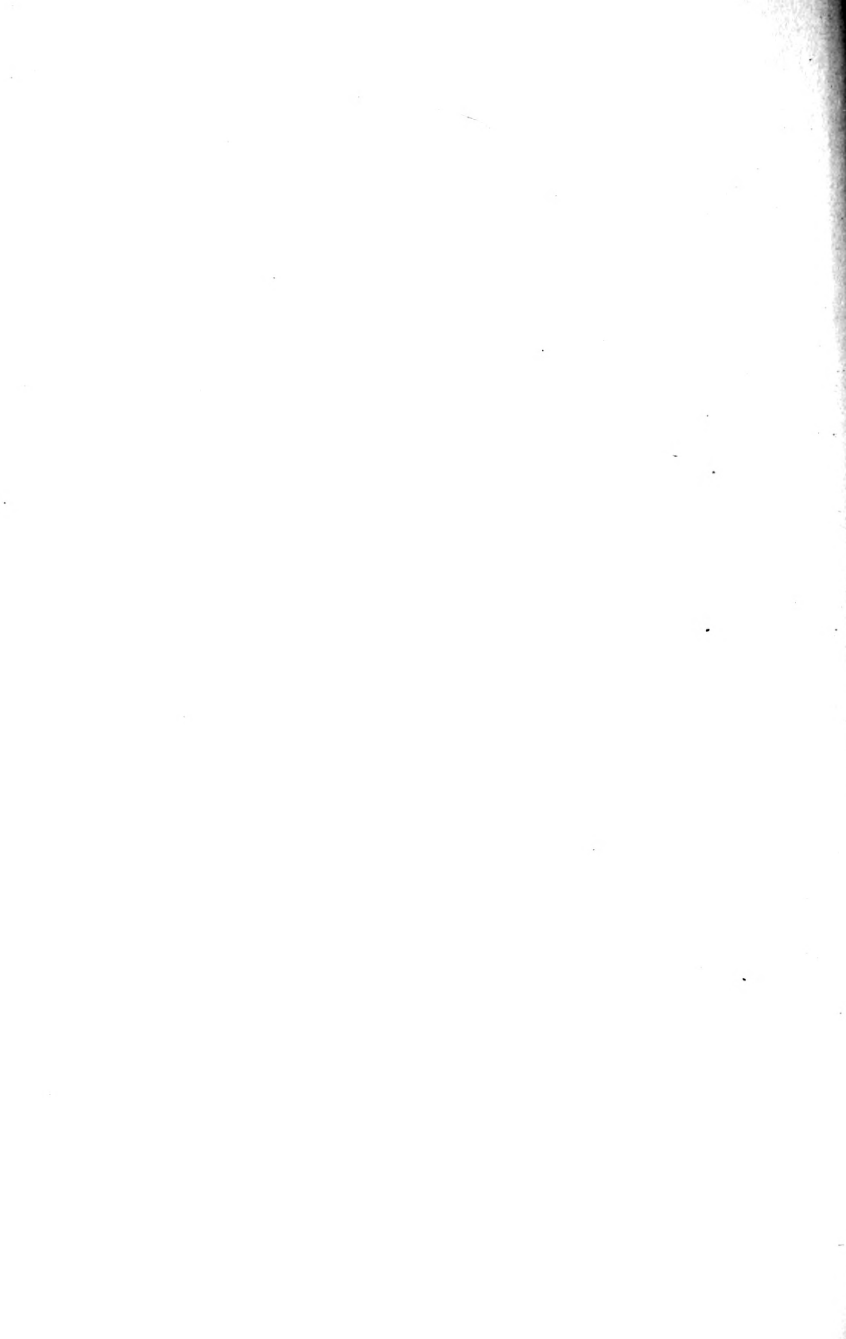
‘You can’t trust me to the bottom of the stairs?’ he asked bitterly.

She all but laughed with glad confidence.

‘Oh, I will trust you!’

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







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